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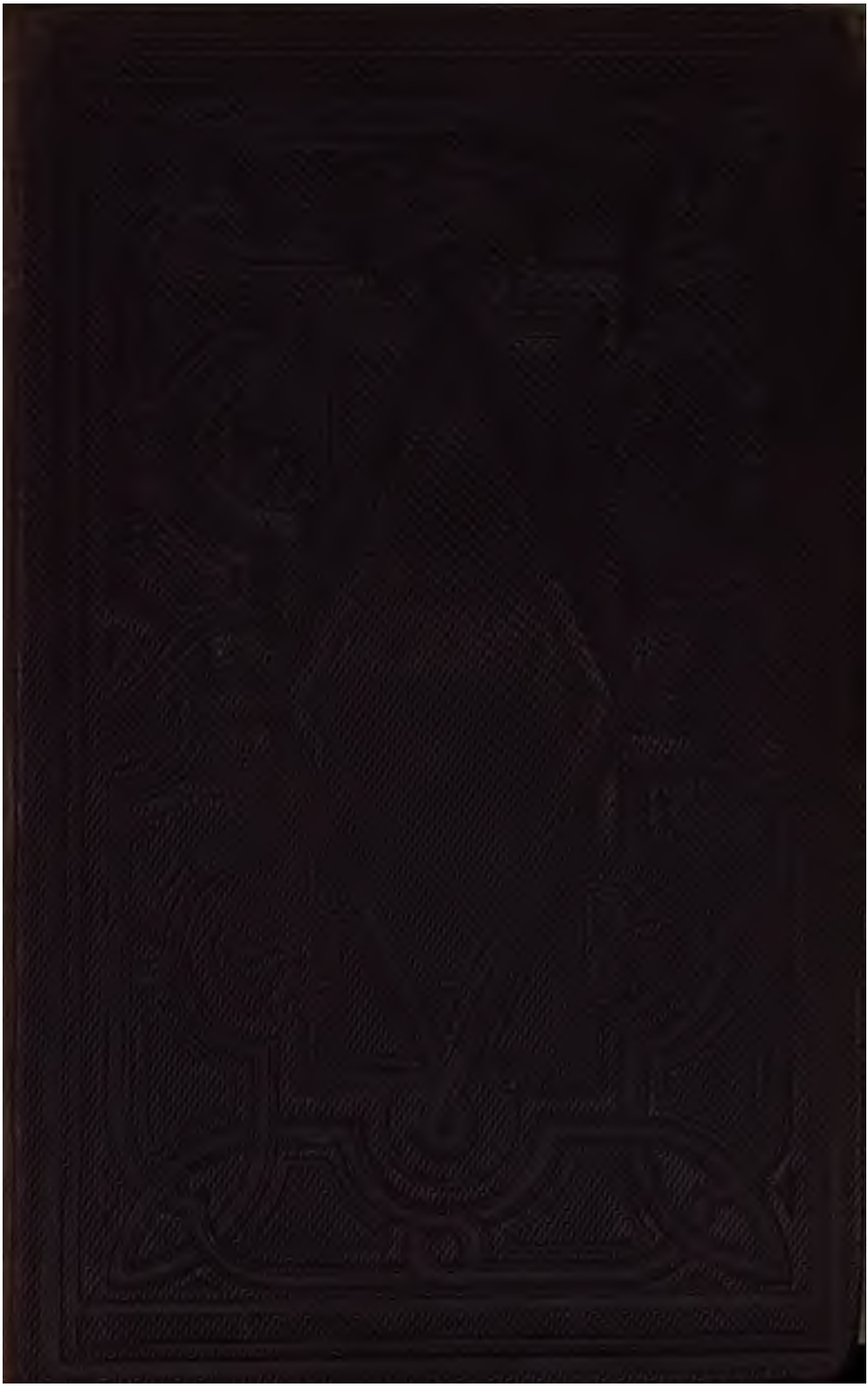

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CASTLE RICHMOND.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

CASTLE RICHMOND.

A Novel.

By ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF 'BARCHESTER TOWERS,' 'DOCTOR THORNE,' 'THE WEST INDIES AND THE SPANISH MAIN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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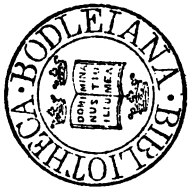

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CASTLE RICHMOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARONY OF DESMOND.

I WONDER whether the novel-reading world—that part of it, at least, which may honour my pages—will be offended if I lay the plot of this story in Ireland! That there is a strong feeling against things Irish it is impossible to deny. Irish servants need not apply; Irish acquaintances are treated with limited confidence; Irish cousins are regarded as being decidedly dangerous; and Irish stories are not popular with the booksellers.

For myself, I may say that if I ought to know anything about any place, I ought to know something about Ireland; and I do strongly protest against the injustice of the above conclusions. Irish cousins I have none. Irish acquaintances I have by dozens; and Irish friends, also, by twos and threes, whom I can love and cherish—almost as well, perhaps, as though they had been born in

Middlesex. Irish servants I have had some in my house for years, and never had one that was faithless, dishonest, or intemperate. I have travelled all over Ireland, closely as few other men can have done, and have never had my portmanteau robbed or my pocket picked. At hotels I have seldom locked up my belongings, and my carelessness has never been punished. I doubt whether as much can be said for English inns.

Irish novels were once popular enough. But there is a fashion in novels, as there is in colours and petticoats; and now I fear they are drugs in the market. It is hard to say why a good story should not have a fair chance of success whatever may be its bent; why it should not be reckoned to be good by its own intrinsic merits alone; but such is by no means the case. I was waiting once, when I was young at the work, in the back parlour of an eminent publisher, hoping to see his eminence on a small matter of business touching a three-volumed manuscript which I held in my hand. The eminent publisher, having probably larger fish to fry, could not see me, but sent his clerk or foreman to arrange the business.

'A novel, is it, sir?' said the foreman.

'Yes,' I answered; 'a novel.'

'It depends very much on the subject,' said the foreman, with a thoughtful and judicious frown—'upon the name, sir, and the subject;—daily life,

sir; that's what suits us; daily English life. Now your historical novel, sir, is not worth the paper it's written on.'

I fear that Irish character is in these days considered almost as unattractive as historical incident; but, nevertheless, I will make the attempt. I am now leaving the Green Isle and my old friends, and would fain say a word of them as I do so. If I do not say that word now it will never be said.

The readability of a story should depend, one would say, on its intrinsic merit rather than on the site of its adventures. No one will think that Hampshire is better for such a purpose than Cumberland, or Essex than Leicestershire. What abstract objection can there then be to the county Cork?

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most beautiful part of Ireland is that which lies down in the extreme south-west, with fingers stretching far out into the Atlantic Ocean. This consists of the counties Cork and Kerry, or a portion, rather, of those counties. It contains Killarney, Glengarriffe, Bantry, and Inchigeela; and is watered by the Lee, the Blackwater, and the Flesk. I know not where is to be found a land more rich in all that constitutes the loveliness of scenery.

Within this district, but hardly within that portion of it which is most attractive to tourists, is situated the house and domain of Castle Richmond.

The river Blackwater rises in the county Kerry, and running from west to east through the northern part of the county Cork, enters the county Waterford beyond Fermoy. In its course it passes near the little town of Kanturk, and through the town of Mallow: Castle Richmond stands close upon its banks, within the barony of Desmond, and in that Kanturk region through which the Mallow and Killarney railway now passes, but which some thirteen years since knew nothing of the navvy's spade, or even of the engineer's theodolite.

Castle Richmond was at this period the abode of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, who resided there, ever and always, with his wife, Lady Fitzgerald, his two daughters, Mary and Emmeline Fitzgerald, and, as often as purposes of education and pleasure suited, with his son Herbert Fitzgerald. Neither Sir Thomas nor Sir Thomas's house had about them any of those interesting picturesque faults which are so generally attributed to Irish landlords and Irish castles. He was not out of elbows, nor was he an absentee. Castle Richmond had no appearance of having been thrown out of its own windows. It was a good, substantial, modern family residence, built not more than thirty years since by the late baronet, with a lawn sloping down to the river, with kitchen gardens and walls for fruit, with ample stables, and a clock over the entrance to the stable-yard. It stood in

a well-timbered park duly stocked with deer,—and with foxes also, which are agricultural animals much more valuable in an Irish county than deer. So that as regards its appearance Castle Richmond might have been in Hampshire or Essex; and as regards his property, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald might have been a Leicestershire baronet.

Here, at Castle Richmond, lived Sir Thomas with his wife and daughters; and here, taking the period of our story as being exactly thirteen years since, his son Herbert was staying also in those hard winter months; his Oxford degree having been taken, and his English pursuits admitting of a temporary sojourn in Ireland.

But Sir Thomas Fitzgerald was not the great man of that part of the country—at least, not the greatest man; nor was Lady Fitzgerald by any means the greatest lady. As this greatest lady, and the greatest man also, will, with their belongings, be among the most prominent of our dramatis personæ, it may be well that I should not even say a word of them.

All the world must have heard of Desmond Court. It is the largest inhabited residence known in that part of the world, where rumours are afloat of how it covers ten acres of ground; how in hewing the stones for it a whole mountain was cut away; how it should have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, only that the money was

never paid by the rapacious, wicked, bloodthirsty old earl who caused it to be erected;—and how the cement was thickened with human blood. So goes rumour with the more romantic of the Celtic tale-bearers.

It is a huge place—huge, ungainly, and uselessly extensive; built at a time when, at any rate in Ireland, men considered neither beauty, aptitude, nor economy. It is three stories high, and stands round a quadrangle, in which there are two entrances opposite to each other. Nothing can be well uglier than that great paved court, in which there is not a spot of anything green, except where the damp has produced an unwholesome growth upon the stones; nothing can well be more desolate. And on the outside of the building matters are not much better. There are no gardens close up to the house, no flower-beds in the nooks and corners, no sweet shrubs peeping in at the square windows. Gardens there are, but they are away, half a mile off; and the great hall door opens out upon a flat, bleak park, with hardly a scrap around it which courtesy can call a lawn.

Here, at this period of ours, lived Clara, Countess of Desmond, widow of Patrick, once Earl of Desmond, and father of Patrick, now Earl of Desmond. These Desmonds had once been mighty men in their country, ruling the people around them as serfs, and ruling them with hot iron rods. But

those days were now long gone, and tradition told little of them that was true. How it had truly fared either with the earl, or with their serfs, men did not well know; but stories were ever being told of walls built with human blood, and of the devil bearing off upon his shoulder a certain earl who was in any other way quite unbearable, and depositing some small unburnt portion of his remains fathoms deep below the soil in an old burying-ground near Kanturk. And there had been a good earl, as is always the case with such families; but even his virtues, according to tradition, had been of a useless namby-pamby sort. He had walked to the shrine of St. Finbar, up in the little island of the Gougane Barra, with unboiled peas in his shoes; had forgiven his tenants five years rent all round, and never drank wine or washed himself after the death of his lady wife.

At the present moment the Desmonds were not so potent either for good or ill. The late earl had chosen to live in London all his life, and had sunk down to be the toadying friend, or perhaps I should more properly say the bullied flunky, of a sensual, wine-bibbing, gluttonous —— king. Late in life, when he was broken in means and character, he had married. The lady of his choice had been chosen as an heiress; but there had been some slip between that cup of fortune and his lip; and she, proud and beautiful, for such she had been—

had neither relieved nor softened the poverty of her profligate old lord.

She was left at his death with two children, of whom the eldest, Lady Clara Desmond, will be the heroine of this story. The youngest, Patrick, now Earl of Desmond, was two years younger than his sister, and will make our acquaintance as a lad fresh from Eton.

In these days money was not plentiful with the Desmonds. Not but that their estates were as wide almost as their renown, and that the Desmonds were still great people in the country's estimation. Desmond Court stood in a bleak, unadorned region, almost among the mountains, half way between Kanturk and Maccoom, and the family had some claim to possession of the land for miles around. The earl of the day was still the head landlord of a huge district extending over the whole barony of Desmond, and half the adjacent baronies of Muskerry and Duhallow; but the head landlord's rent in many cases hardly amounted to sixpence an acre, and even those sixpences did not always find their way into the earl's pocket. When the late earl had attained his sceptre, he might probably have been entitled to spend some ten thousand a year; but when he died, and during the years just previous to that, he had hardly been entitled to spend anything.

But, nevertheless, the Desmonds were great people, and owned a great name. They had been kings once over those wild mountains; and would be still, some said, if every one had his own. Their grandeur was shown by the prevalence of their name. The barony in which they lived was the barony of Desmond. The river which gave water to their cattle was the river Desmond. The wretched, ragged, poverty-stricken village near their own dismantled gate was the town of Desmond. The earl was Earl of Desmond—not Earl Desmond, mark you; and the family name was Desmond. The grandfather of the present earl, who had repaired his fortune by selling himself at the time of the Union, had been Desmond Desmond, Earl of Desmond.

The late earl, the friend of the most illustrious person in the kingdom, had not been utterly able to rob his heir of everything, or he would undoubtedly have done so. At the age of twenty-one the young earl would come into possession of the property, damaged certainly, as far as an actively evil father could damage it by long leases, bad management, lack of outlay, and rack-renting;—but still into the possession of a considerable property. In the mean time it did not fare very well, in a pecuniary way, with Clara, the widowed countess, or with the Lady Clara, her daughter. The means at the widow's disposal

were only those which the family trustees would allow her as the earl's mother: on his coming of age she would have almost no means of her own; and for her daughter no provision whatever had been made.

As this first chapter is devoted wholly to the locale of my story, I will not stop to say a word as to the persons or characters of either of these two ladies, leaving them, as I did the Castle Richmond family, to come forth upon the canvas as opportunity may offer. But there is another homestead in this same barony of Desmond, of which and of its owner—as being its owner—I will say a word.

Hap House was also the property of a Fitzgerald. It had originally been built by an old Sir Simon Fitzgerald, for the use and behoof of a second son, and the present owner of it was the grandson of that man for whom it had been built. And old Sir Simon had given his offspring not only a house—he had endowed the house with a comfortable little slice of land, either cut from the large patrimonial loaf, or else, as was more probable, collected together and separately baked for this younger branch of the family. Be that as it may, Hap House had of late years been always regarded as conferring some seven or eight hundred a year upon its possessor, and when young Owen Fitzgerald succeeded to this property, on the death

of an uncle in the year 1843, he was regarded as a rich man to that extent.

At that time he was some twenty-two years of age, and he came down from Dublin, where his friends had intended that he should practise as a barrister, to set up for himself as a country gentleman. Hap House was distant from Castle Richmond about four miles, standing also on the river Blackwater, but nearer to Mallow. It was a pleasant, comfortable residence, too large no doubt for such a property, as is so often the case in Ireland; surrounded by pleasant grounds and pleasant gardens, with a gorse fox covert belonging to the place within a mile of it, with a slated lodge, and a pretty drive along the river. At the age of twenty-two, Owen Fitzgerald came into all this; and as he at once resided upon the place, he came in also for the good graces of all the mothers with unmarried daughters in the county, and for the smiles also of many of the daughters themselves.

Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald were not his uncle and aunt, but nevertheless they took kindly to him;—very kindly at first, though that kindness after a while became less warm. He was the nearest relation of the name; and should anything happen—as the fatal death-foretelling phrase goes—to young Herbert Fitzgerald, he would

become the heir of the family title and of the family place.

When I hear of a young man sitting down by himself as the master of a household, without a wife, or even without a mother or sister to guide him, I always anticipate danger. If he does not go astray in any other way, he will probably mismanage his money matters. And then there are so many other ways. A house, if it be not made pleasant by domestic pleasant things, must be made pleasant by pleasure. And a bachelor's pleasures in his own house are always dangerous. There is too much wine drunk at his dinner parties. His guests sit too long over their cards. The servants know that they want a mistress; and, in the absence of that mistress, the language of the household becomes loud and harsh—and sometimes improper. Young men among us seldom go quite straight in their course, unless they are, at any rate occasionally, brought under the influence of tea and small talk.

There was no tea and small talk at Hap House, but there were hunting-dinners. Owen Fitzgerald was soon known for his horses and his riding. He lived in the very centre of the Duhallow hunt; and before he had been six months owner of his property had built additional stables, with half a dozen loose boxes for his friends' nags. He had

an eye, too, for a pretty girl—not always in the way that is approved of by mothers with marriageable daughters; but in the way of which they so decidedly disapprove.

And thus old ladies began to say bad things. Those pleasant hunting-dinners were spoken of as the Hap House orgies. It was declared that men slept there half the day, having played cards all the night; and dreadful tales were told. Of these tales one-half was doubtless false. But, alas, alas! what if one-half were also true?

It is undoubtedly a very dangerous thing for a young man of twenty-two to keep house by himself, either in town or country.

CHAPTER II.

OWEN FITZGERALD.

I HAVE tied myself down to thirteen years ago as the time of my story; but I must go back a little beyond this for its first scenes, and work my way up as quickly as may be to the period indicated. I have spoken of a winter in which Herbert Fitzgerald was at home at Castle Richmond, having then completed his Oxford doings; but I must say something of two years previous to that, of a time when Herbert was not so well known in the county as was his cousin of Hap House.

It was a thousand pities that a bad word should ever have been spoken of Owen Fitzgerald; ten thousand pities that he should ever have given occasion for such bad word. He was a fine, high-spirited, handsome fellow, with a loving heart within his breast, and bright thoughts within his brain. It was utterly wrong that a man constituted as he was should commence life by living alone in a large country-house. But those who

spoke ill of him should have remembered that this was his misfortune rather than his fault. Some greater endeavour might perhaps have been made to rescue him from evil ways. Very little such endeavour was made at all. Sir Thomas once or twice spoke to him; but Sir Thomas was not an energetic man; and as for Lady Fitzgerald, though she was in many things all that was excellent, she was far too diffident to attempt the reformation of a headstrong young man, who after all was only distantly connected with her.

And thus there was no such attempt, and poor Owen became the subject of ill report without any substantial effort having been made to save him. He was a very handsome man—tall, being somewhat over six feet in height—athletic, almost more than in proportion—with short, light chestnut-tinted hair, blue eyes, and a mouth perfect as that of Phœbus. He was clever, too, though perhaps not educated as carefully as might have been: his speech was usually rapid, hearty, and short, and not seldom caustic and pointed. Had he fallen among good hands, he might have done very well in the world's fight; but with such a character, and lacking such advantages, it was quite as open to him to do ill. Alas! the latter chance seemed to have fallen to him.

For the first year of his residence at Hap House, he was popular enough among his neighbours.

The Hap House orgies were not commenced at once, nor when commenced did they immediately become a subject of scandal; and even during the second year he was tolerated;—tolerated by all, and still flattered by some.

Among the different houses in the country at which he had become intimate was that of the Countess of Desmond. The Countess of Desmond did not receive much company at Desmond Court. She had not the means, nor perhaps the will, to fill the huge old house with parties of her Irish neighbours—for she herself was English to the backbone. Ladies of course made morning calls, and gentlemen too, occasionally; but society at Desmond Court was for some years pretty much confined to this cold formal mode of visiting. Owen Fitzgerald, however, did obtain admittance into the precincts of the Desmond barracks.

He went there first with the young earl, who, then quite a boy, had had an ugly tumble from his pony in the hunting-field. The countess had expressed herself as very grateful for young Fitzgerald's care, and thus an intimacy had sprung up. Owen had gone there once or twice to see the lad, and on those occasions had dined there; and on one occasion, at the young earl's urgent request, had stayed and slept.

And then the good-natured people of Muskerry,

Duhallow, and Desmond began, of course, to say that the widow was going to marry the young man. And why not? she was still a beautiful woman; not yet forty by a good deal, said the few who took her part; or at any rate, not much over, as was admitted by the many who condemned her. We, who have been admitted to her secrets, know that she was then in truth only thirty-eight. She was beautiful, proud, and clever; and if it would suit her to marry a handsome young fellow with a good house and an unembarrassed income of eight hundred a year, why should she not do so? As for him, would it not be a great thing for him to have a countess for his wife, and an earl for his stepson?

What ideas the countess had on this subject we will not just now trouble ourselves to inquire. But as to young Owen Fitzgerald, we may declare at once that no thought of such a wretched alliance ever entered his head. He was sinful in many things, and foolish in many things. But he had not that vile sin, that unmanly folly, which would have made a marriage with a widowed countess eligible in his eyes, merely because she was a countess, and not more than fifteen years his senior. In a matter of love he would as soon have thought of paying his devotions to his far-away cousin, old Miss Barbara Beamish, of Ballyclahassan, of whom it was said that she

had set her cap at every unmarried man that had come into the west riding of the county for the last forty years. No; it may at any rate be said of Owen Fitzgerald, that he was not the man to make up to a widowed countess for the sake of the reflected glitter which might fall on him from her coronet.

But the Countess of Desmond was not the only lady at Desmond Court. I have before said that she had a daughter, the Lady Clara, the heroine of this coming story; and it may be now right that I should attempt some short description of her; her virtues and faults, her merits and defects. It shall be very short; for let an author describe as he will, he cannot by such course paint the characters of his personages on the minds of his readers. It is by gradual, earnest efforts that this must be done—if it be done. Ten, nay, twenty pages of the finest descriptive writing that ever fell from the pen of a novelist will not do it.

Clara Desmond, when young Fitzgerald first saw her, had hardly attained that incipient stage of womanhood which justifies a mother in taking her out into the gaieties of the world. She was then only sixteen; and had not in her manner and appearance so much of the woman as is the case with many girls of that age. She was shy and diffident in manner, thin and tall

in person. If I were to say that she was angular and bony, I should disgust my readers, who, disliking the term, would not stop to consider how many sweetest girls are at that age truly subject to those epithets. Their undeveloped but active limbs are long and fleshless, the contour of their face is the same, their elbows and shoulders are pointed, their feet and hands seem to possess length without breadth. Birth and breeding have given them the frame of beauty, to which coming years will add the soft roundness of form, and the rich glory of colour. The plump, rosy girl of fourteen, though she also is very sweet, never rises to such celestial power of feminine grace as she who is angular and bony, whose limbs are long, and whose joints are sharp.

Such was Clara Desmond at sixteen. But still, even then, to those who were gifted with the power of seeing, she gave promise of great loveliness. Her eyes were long and large, and wonderfully clear. There was a liquid depth in them which enabled the gazer to look down into them as he would into the green, pellucid transparency of still ocean water. And then they said so much—those young eyes of hers: from her mouth in those early years words came but scantily, but from her eyes questions rained quicker than any other eyes could answer them.

Questions of wonder at what the world contained, —of wonder as to what men thought and did; questions as to the inmost heart, and truth, and purpose of the person questioned. And all this was asked by a glance now and again; by a glance of those long, shy, liquid eyes, which were ever falling on the face of him she questioned, and then ever as quickly falling from it.

Her face, as I have said, was long and thin, but it was the longness and thinness of growing youth. The natural lines of it were full of beauty, of pale silent beauty, too proud in itself to boast itself much before the world, to make itself common among many. Her hair was already long and rich, but was light in colour, much lighter than it grew to be when some four or five more years had passed over her head. At the time of which I speak she wore it in simple braids brushed back from her forehead, not having as yet learned that majestic mode of sweeping it from her face which has in subsequent years so generally prevailed.

And what then of her virtues and her faults— of her merits and defects? Will it not be better to leave them all to time and the coming pages? That she was proud of her birth, proud of being an Irish Desmond, proud even of her poverty, so much I may say of her, even at that early age. In that she was careless of the world's

esteem, fond to a fault of romance, poetic in her temperament, and tender in her heart, she shared the ordinary — shall I say foibles or virtues?—of so many of her sex. She was passionately fond of her brother, but not nearly equally so of her mother, of whom the brother was too evidently the favoured child.

She had lived much alone; alone, that is, with her governess and with servants at Desmond Court. Not that she had been neglected by her mother, but she had hardly found herself to be her mother's companion; and other companions there she had had none. When she was sixteen her governess was still with her; but a year later than that she was left quite alone, except inasmuch as she was with her mother.

She was sixteen when she first began to ask questions of Owen Fitzgerald's face with those large eyes of hers; and she saw much of him, and he of her, for the twelve months immediately after that. Much of him, that is, as much goes in this country of ours, where four or five interviews in as many months between friends is supposed to signify that they are often together. But this much-seeing occurred chiefly during the young earl's holidays. Now and again he did ride over in the long intervals, and when he did do so was not frowned upon by the countess; and so, at the end of the winter holidays subse-

quent to that former winter in which the earl had had his tumble, people through the county began to say that he and the countess were about to become man and wife.

It was just then that people in the county were also beginning to talk of the Hap House orgies; and the double scandal reached Owen's ears, one shortly after the other. That orgies scandal did not hurt him much. It is, alas! too true that consciousness of such a reputation does not often hurt a young man's feelings. But the other rumour did wound him. What! he sell himself to a widowed countess, almost old enough to be his mother; or bestow himself rather,—for what was there in return that could be reckoned as a price? At any rate, he had given no one cause to utter such falsehood, such calumny as that. No; it certainly was not probable that he should marry the countess.

But this set him to ask himself whether it might or might not be possible that he should marry some one else. Might it not be well for him if he could find a younger bride at Desmond Court? Not for nothing had he ridden over there through those bleak mountains; not for nothing, nor yet solely with the view of tying flies for the young earl's summer fishing, or preparing the new nag for his winter's hunting. Those large bright eyes had asked him many

questions. Would it not be well that he should answer them?

For many months of that year Clara Desmond had hardly spoken to him. Then, in the summer evening, as he and her brother would lie sprawling together on the banks of the little Desmond river, while the lad was talking of his fish, and his school, and his cricket club, she would stand by and listen, and so gradually she learned to speak.

And the mother also would sometimes be there; or else she would welcome Fitzgerald in to tea, and let him stay there talking as though they were all at home, till he would have to make a midnight ride of it before he reached Hap House. It seemed that no fear as to her daughter had ever crossed the mother's mind; that no idea had ever come upon her that her favoured visitor might learn to love the young girl with whom he was allowed to associate on so intimate a footing. Once or twice he had caught himself calling her Clara, and had done so even before her mother; but no notice had been taken of it. In truth, Lady Desmond did not know her daughter, for the mother took her absolutely to be a child, when in fact she was a child no longer.

'You take Clara round by the bridge,' said the earl to his friend one August evening, as they

were standing together on the banks of the river, about a quarter of a mile distant from the sombre old pile in which the family lived. 'You take Clara round by the bridge, and I will get over the stepping-stones.' And so the lad, with his rod in his hand, began to descend the steep bank.

'I can get over the stepping-stones, too, Patrick,' said she.

'Can you though, my gay young woman? You'll be over your ankles if you do. That rain didn't come down yesterday for nothing.'

Clara as she spoke had come up to the bank, and now looked wistfully down at the stepping-stones. She had crossed them scores of times, sometimes with her brother, and often by herself. Why was it that she was so anxious to cross them now?

'It's no use your trying,' said her brother, who was now half across, and who spoke from the middle of the river. 'Don't you let her, Owen. She'll slip in, and then there will be no end of a row up at the house.'

'You had better come round by the bridge,' said Fitzgerald. 'It is not only that the stones are nearly under water, but they are wet, and you would slip.'

So cautioned, Lady Clara allowed herself to be persuaded, and turned upwards along the river by a little path that led to a foot bridge. It was

some quarter of a mile thither, and it would be the same distance down the river again before she regained her brother.

'I needn't bring you with me, you know,' she said to Fitzgerald. 'You can get over the stones easily, and I can go very well by myself.'

But it was not probable that he would let her do so. 'Why should I not go with you?' he said. 'When I get there I have nothing to do but see him fish. Only if we were to leave him by himself he would not be happy.'

'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald, how very kind you are to him! I do so often think of it. How dull his holidays would be in this place if it were not for you!'

'And what a godsend his holidays are to me!' said Owen. 'When they come round I can ride over here and see him, and you—and your mother. Do you think that I am not dull also, living alone at Hap House, and that this is not an infinite blessing to me?'

He had named them all—son, daughter, and mother; but there had been a something in his voice, an almost inappreciable something in his tone, which had seemed to mark to Clara's hearing that she herself was not the least prized of the three attractions. She had felt this rather than realized it, and the feeling was not unpleasant.

'I only know that you are very goodnatured,' she continued, 'and that Patrick is very fond of you. Sometimes I think he almost takes you for a brother.' And then a sudden thought flashed across her mind, and she said hardly a word more to him that evening.

This had been at the close of the summer holidays. After that he had been once or twice at Desmond Court, before the return of the boy from Eton; but on these occasions he had been more with the countess than with her daughter. On the last of these visits, just before the holidays commenced, he had gone over respecting a hunter he had bought for Lord Desmond, and on this occasion he did not even see Clara.

The countess, when she had thanked him for his trouble in the matter of the purchase, hesitated a moment, and then went on to speak of other matters.

'I understand, Mr. Fitzgerald,' said she, 'that you have been very gay at Hap House since the hunting commenced.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Owen, half laughing and half blushing. 'It's a convenient place for some of the men, and one must be sociable.'

'Sociable! yes, one ought to be sociable certainly. But I am always afraid of the sociability of young men without ladies. Do not be angry

with me if I venture as a friend to ask you not to be too sociable.'

'I know what you mean, Lady Desmond. People have been accusing us of—of being rakes. Isn't that it?'

'Yes, Mr. Fitzgerald, that is it. But then I know that I have no right to speak to you on such a—such a subject.'

'Yes, yes; you have every right,' said he, warmly; 'more right than any one else.'

'Oh, no; Sir Thomas, you know—'

'Well, yes, Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas is very well, and so also is Lady Fitzgerald; but I do not feel the same interest about them that I do about you. And they are such humdrum, quiet-going people. As for Herbert, I'm afraid he'll turn out a prig.'

'Well, Mr. Fitzgerald, if you give me the right I shall use it.' And getting up from her chair, and coming to him where he stood, she looked kindly into his face. It was a bonny, handsome face for a woman to gaze on, and there was much kindness in hers as she smiled on him. Nay, there was almost more than kindness, he thought, as he caught her eye. It was like,—almost like the sweetness of motherly love. 'And I shall scold you,' she continued. 'People say that for two or three nights running men have been playing cards at Hap House till morning.'

'Yes, I had some men there for a week. I could not take their candles away, and put them to bed; could I, Lady Desmond?'

'And there were late suppers, and drinking of toasts, and headaches in the morning, and breakfast at three o'clock, and gentlemen with very pale faces when they appeared rather late at the meet—eh, Mr. Fitzgerald?' And she held up one finger at him, as she upbraided him with a smile. The smile was so sweet, so unlike her usual look; that, to tell the truth, was often too sad and careworn for her age.

'Such things do happen, Lady Desmond.'

'Ah, yes; they do happen. And with such a one as you, heaven knows I do not begrudge the pleasure, if it were but now and then,—once again and then done with. But you are too bright and too good for such things to continue.' And she took his hand and pressed it, as a mother or a mother's dearest friend might have done. 'It would so grieve me to think that you should be even in danger of shipwreck.

'You will not be angry with me for taking this liberty?' she continued.

'Angry! how could any man be angry for such kindness?'

'And you will think of what I say. I would not have you unsociable, or morose, or inhospitable; but——'

'I understand, Lady Desmond; but when young men are together, one cannot always control them.'

'But you will try. Say that you will try because I have asked you.'

He promised that he would, and then went his way, proud in his heart at this solicitude. And how could he not be proud? was she not high in rank, proud in character, beautiful withal, and the mother of Clara Desmond? What sweeter friend could a man have; what counsellor more potent to avert those dangers which now hovered round his head?

And as he rode home he was half in love with the countess. Where is the young man who has not in his early years been half in love with some woman older, much older than himself, who has half conquered his heart by her solicitude for his welfare?—with some woman who has whispered to him while others were talking, who has told him in such gentle, loving tones of his boyish follies, whose tenderness and experience together have educated him and made him manly? Young men are so proud, proud in their inmost hearts, of such tenderness and solicitude, as long as it remains secret and wrapt as it were in a certain mystery. Such liaisons have the interests of intrigue, without—I was going to say without its dangers. Alas! it may be that it is not always so.

Owen Fitzgerald as he rode home was half in love with the countess. Not that his love was of a kind which made him in any way desirous of marrying her, or of kneeling at her feet and devoting himself to her for ever; not that it in any way interfered with the other love which he was beginning to feel for her daughter. But he thought with pleasure of the tone of her voice, of the pressure of her hand, of the tenderness which he had found in her eye.

It was after that time, as will be understood, that some goodnatured friend had told him that he was regarded in the county as the future husband of Lady Desmond. At first he laughed at this as being—as he himself said to himself—too good a joke. When the report first reached him, it seemed to be a joke which he could share so pleasantly with the countess. For men of three and twenty, though they are so fond of the society of women older than themselves, understand so little the hearts and feelings of such women. In his ideas there was an interval as of another generation between him and the countess. In her thoughts the interval was probably much less striking.

But the accusation was made to him again and again till it wounded him, and he gave up that notion of a mutual joke with his kind friend at Desmond Court. It did not occur to him that

she could ever think of loving him as her lord and master; but it was brought home to him that other people thought so.

A year had now passed by since those winter holidays in which Clara Desmond had been sixteen, and during which she was described by epithets which will not, I fear, have pleased my readers. Those epithets were now somewhat less deserved, but still the necessity of them had not entirely passed away. Her limbs were still thin and long, and her shoulders pointed; but the growth of beauty had commenced, and in Owen's eyes she was already very lovely.

At Christmas-time during that winter a ball was given at Castle Richmond, to celebrate the coming of age of the young heir. It was not a very gay affair, for the Castle Richmond folk, even in those days, were not very gay people. Sir Thomas, though only fifty, was an old man for his age; and Lady Fitzgerald, though known intimately by the poor all round her, was not known intimately by any but the poor. Mary and Emmeline Fitzgerald, with whom we shall become better acquainted as we advance in our story, were nice, good girls, and handsome withal; but they had not that special gift which enables some girls to make a party in their own house bright in spite of all obstacles.

We should have but little to do with this ball,

were it not that Clara Desmond was here first brought out, as the term goes. It was the first large party to which she had been taken, and it was to her a matter of much wonder and inquiry with those wondering, speaking eyes.

And Owen Fitzgerald was there ;—as a matter of course, the reader will say. By no means so. Previous to that ball Owen's sins had been commented upon at Castle Richmond, and Sir Thomas had expostulated with him. These expostulations had not been received quite so graciously as those of the handsome countess, and there had been anger at Castle Richmond.

Now there was living in the house of Castle Richmond one Miss Letty Fitzgerald, a maiden sister of the baronet's, older than her brother by full ten years. In her character there was more of energy, and also much more of harsh judgment, and of consequent ill-nature, than in that of her brother. When the letters of invitation were being sent out by the two girls, she had given a decided opinion that the reprobate should not be asked. But the reprobate's cousins, with that partiality for a rake which is so common to young ladies, would not abide by their aunt's command, and referred the matter both to mamma and papa. Mamma thought it very hard that their own cousin should be refused admittance to their house, and very dreadful that his sins should be considered

to be of so deep a dye as to require so severe a sentence; and then papa, much balancing the matter, gave final orders that the prodigal cousin should be admitted.

He was admitted, and dangerously he used the privilege. The countess, who was there, stood up to dance twice, and twice only. She opened the ball with young Herbert Fitzgerald the heir; and in about an hour afterwards she danced again with Owen. He did not ask her twice; but he asked her daughter three or four times, and three or four times he asked her successfully.

'Clara,' whispered the mother to her child, after the last of these occasions, giving some little pull or twist to her girl's frock as she did so, 'you had better not dance with Owen Fitzgerald again to-night. People will remark about it.'

'Will they?' said Clara, and immediately sat down, checked in her young happiness.

Not many minutes afterwards, Owen came up to her again. 'May we have another waltz together, I wonder?' he said.

'Not to-night, I think. I am rather tired already.' And so she did not waltz again all the evening, for fear she should offend him.

But the countess, though she had thus interdicted her daughter's dancing with the master of Hap House, had not done so through any absolute fear. To her, her girl was still a child; a child

without a woman's thoughts, or any of a woman's charms. And then it was so natural that Clara should like to dance with almost the only gentleman who was not absolutely a stranger to her. Lady Desmond had been actuated rather by a feeling that it would be well that Clara should begin to know other persons.

By that feeling,—and perhaps unconsciously by another, that it would be well that Owen Fitzgerald should be relieved from his attendance on the child, and enabled to give it to the mother. Whether Lady Desmond had at that time realized any ideas as to her own interest in this young man, it was at any rate true that she loved to have him near her. She had refused to dance a second time with Herbert Fitzgerald; she had refused to stand up with any other person who had asked her; but with Owen she would either have danced again, or have kept him by her side, while she explained to him with flattering frankness that she could not do so lest others should be offended.

And Owen was with her frequently through the evening. She was taken to and from supper by Sir Thomas, but any other takings that were incurred were done by him. He led her from one drawing-room to another; he took her empty coffee-cup; he stood behind her chair, and talked to her; and he brought her the scarf which she had left

elsewhere; and finally, he put a shawl round her neck while old Sir Thomas was waiting to hand her to her carriage. Reader, good-natured, middle-aged reader, remember that she was only thirty-eight, and that hitherto she had known nothing of the delights of love. By the young, any such hallucination on her part, at her years, will be regarded as lunacy, or at least frenzy.

Owen Fitzgerald drove home from that ball in a state of mind that was hardly satisfactory. In the first place, Miss Letty had made a direct attack upon his morals, which he had not answered in the most courteous manner.

'I have heard a great deal of your doings, Master Owen,' she said to him. 'A fine house you're keeping.'

'Why don't you come and join us, Aunt Letty?' he replied. 'It would be just the thing for you.'

'God forbid!' said the old maid, turning up her eyes to heaven.

'Oh, you might do worse, you know. With us you'd only drink and play cards, and perhaps hear a little strong language now and again. But what's that to slander, and calumny, and bearing false witness against one's neighbour?' and so saying he ended that interview—not in a manner to ingratiate himself with his relative, Miss Letty Fitzgerald.

After that, in the supper-room, more than one wag of a fellow had congratulated him on his success with the widow. 'She's got some sort of a jointure, I suppose,' said one. 'She's very young-looking, certainly, to be the mother of that girl,' declared another. 'Upon my word, she's a handsome woman still,' said a third. 'And what title will you get when you marry her, Fitz?' asked a fourth, who was rather ignorant as to the phases under which the British peerage develops itself.

Fitzgerald pshawed, and pished, and poohed; and then, breaking away from them, rode home. He felt that he must at any rate put an end to this annoyance about the countess, and that he must put an end also to his state of doubt about the countess's daughter. Clara had been kind and gracious to him in the first part of the evening; nay, almost more than gracious. Why had she been so cold when he went up to her on that last occasion? why had she gathered herself like a snail into its shell for the rest of the evening?

The young earl had also been at the party, and had exacted a promise from Owen that he would be over at Desmond Court on the next day. It had almost been on Owen's lips to tell his friend, not only that he would be there, but what would be his intention when he got there. He knew

that the lad loved him well; and almost fancied that, earl as he was, he would favour his friend's suit. But a feeling that Lord Desmond was only a boy, restrained him. It would not be well to induce one so young to agree to an arrangement of which in after and more mature years he would so probably disapprove.

But not the less did Fitzgerald, as he drove home, determine that on the next day he would know something of his fate: and with this resolve he endeavoured to comfort himself as he drove up into his own avenue, and betook himself to his own solitary home.

CHAPTER III.

CLARA DESMOND.

It had been Clara Desmond's first ball, and on the following morning she had much to occupy her thoughts. In the first place, had she been pleased or had she not? Had she been most gratified or most pained?

Girls when they ask themselves such questions seldom give themselves fair answers. She had liked dancing with Owen Fitzgerald; oh, so much! She had liked dancing with others too, though she had not known them, and had hardly spoken to them. The mere act of dancing, with the loud music in the room, and the gay dresses and bright lights around her, had been delightful. But then it had pained her—she knew not why, but it had pained her—when her mother told her that people would make remarks about her. Had she done anything improper on this her first entry into the world? Was her conduct to be scanned, and judged, and condemned, while she

was flattering herself that no one had noticed her but him who was speaking to her?

Their breakfast was late, and the countess sat, as was her wont, with her book beside her tea-cup, speaking a word every now and again to her son.

'Owen will be over here to-day,' said he. 'We are going to have a schooling match down on the Callows.' Now in Ireland a schooling match means the amusement of teaching your horses to jump.

'Will he?' said Lady Desmond, looking up from her book for a moment. 'Mind you bring him in to lunch; I want to speak to him.'

'He doesn't care much about lunch, I fancy,' said he; 'and, maybe, we shall be half way to Millstreet by that time.'

'Never mind, but do as I tell you. You expect everybody to be as wild and wayward as yourself.' And the countess smiled on her son in a manner which showed that she was proud even of his wildness and his waywardness.

Clara had felt that she blushed when she heard that Mr. Fitzgerald was to be there that morning. She felt that her own manner became constrained, and was afraid that her mother should look at her. Owen had said nothing to her about love; and she, child as she was, had thought nothing above love. But she was con-

scious of something, she knew not what. He had touched her hand during those dances as it had never been touched before; he had looked into her eyes, and her eyes had fallen before his glance; he had pressed her waist, and she had felt that there was tenderness in the pressure. So she blushed, and almost trembled, when she heard that he was coming, and was glad in her heart when she found that there was neither anger nor sunshine in her mother's face.

Not long after breakfast, the earl went out on his horse, and met Owen at some gate or back entrance. In his opinion the old house was stupid, and the women in it were stupid companions in the morning. His heart for the moment was engaged on the thought of making his animal take the most impracticable leaps which he could find, and it did not occur to him at first to give his mother's message to his companion. As for lunch, they would get a biscuit and glass of cherry-brandy at Wat M'Carthy's, of Drumban; and as for his mother having anything to say, that of course went for nothing.

Owen would have been glad to have gone up to the house, but in that he was frustrated by the earl's sharpness in catching him. His next hope was to get through the promised lesson in horse-leaping as quickly as possible, so that he might return to Desmond Court, and take his chance of

meeting Clara. But in this he found the earl very difficult to manage.

'Oh, Owen, we won't go there,' he said, when Fitzgerald proposed a canter through some meadows down by the river-side. 'There are only a few gripes'—Irish for small ditches—'and I have ridden Fireball over them a score of times. I want you to come away towards Drumban.'

'Drumban! why Drumban's seven miles from here.'

'What matter? Besides, it's not six the way I'll take you. I want to see Wat M'Carthy especially. He has a litter of puppies there, out of that black bitch of his, and I mean to make him give me one of them.'

But on that morning, Owen Fitzgerald would not allow himself to be taken so far a-field as Drumban, even on a mission so important as this. The young lord fought the matter stoutly; but it ended by his being forced to content himself with picking out all the most dangerous parts of the fences in the river meadows.

'Why, you've hardly tried your own mare at all,' said the lad, reproachfully.

'I'm going to hunt her on Saturday,' said Owen; 'and she'll have quite enough to do then.'

'Well, you're very slow to-day. You're done up with the dancing, I think. And what do you mean to do now?'

'I'll go home with you, I think, and pay my respects to the countess.'

'By-the-by, I was to bring you in to lunch. She said she wanted to see you. By jingo, I forgot all about it! But you've all become very stupid among you, I know that.' And so they rode back to Desmond Court, entering the demesne by one of the straight, dull, level roads which led up to the house.

But it did not suit the earl to ride on the road while the grass was so near him; so they turned off with a curve across what was called the park, thus prolonging their return by about double the necessary distance.

As they were cantering on, Owen saw her of whom he was in quest walking in the road which they had left. His best chance of seeing her alone had been that of finding her outside the house. He knew that the countess rarely or never walked with her daughter, and that, as the governess was gone, Clara was driven to walk by herself.

'Desmond,' he said, pulling up his horse, 'do you go on and tell your mother that I will be with her almost immediately.'

'Why, where are you off to now?'

'There is your sister, and I must ask her how she is after the ball;' and so saying he trotted back in the direction of the road.

Lady Clara had seen them; and though she had hardly turned her head, she had seen also how suddenly Mr. Fitzgerald had stopped his horse, and turned his course when he perceived her. At the first moment she had been almost angry with him for riding away from her, and now she felt almost angry with him because he did not do so.

He slackened his pace as he came near her, and approached her at a walk. There was very little of the faint heart about Owen Fitzgerald at any time, or in anything that he attempted. He had now made up his mind fairly to tell Clara Desmond that he loved her, and to ask for her love in return. He had resolved to do so, and there was very little doubt but that he would carry out his resolution. But he had in nowise made up his mind how he should do it, or what his words should be. And now that he saw her so near him he wanted a moment to collect his thoughts.

He took off his hat as he rode up, and asked her whether she was tired after the ball; and then dismounting, he left his mare to follow as she pleased.

'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald, won't she run away?' said Clara, as she gave him her hand.

'Oh, no; she has been taught better than that. But you don't tell me how you are. I thought

you were tired last night when I saw that you had altogether given over dancing.' And then he walked on beside her, and the docile mare followed them like a dog.

'No, I was not tired; at least, not exactly,' said Clara, blushing again and again, being conscious that she blushed. 'But—but—you know it was the first ball I was ever at.'

'That is just the reason why you should have enjoyed it the more, instead of sitting down as you did, and being dull and unhappy. For I know you were unhappy; I could see it.'

'Was I?' said Clara, not knowing what else to say.

'Yes; and I'll tell you what. I could see more than that; it was I that made you unhappy.'

'You, Mr. Fitzgerald!'

'Yes, I. You will not deny it, because you are so true. I asked you to dance with me too often. And because you refused me, you did not like to dance with any one else. I saw it all. Will you deny that it was so?'

'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald!' Poor girl! She did not know what to say; how to shape her speech into indifference; how to assure him that he made himself out to be of too much consequence by far; how to make it plain that she had not danced because there was no one there worth

dancing with. Had she been out for a year or two, instead of being such a novice, she would have accomplished all this in half a dozen words. As it was, her tell-tale face confessed it all, and she was only able to ejaculate, 'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald!'

'When I went there last night,' he continued, 'I had only one wish—one hope. That was, to see you pleased and happy. I knew it was your first ball, and I did so long to see you enjoy it.'

'And so I did, till——'

'Till what? Will you not let me ask?'

'Mamma said something to me, and that stopped me from dancing.'

'She told you not to dance with me. Was that it?'

How was it possible that she should have had a chance with him; innocent, young, and ignorant as she was? She did not tell him in words that so it had been; but she looked into his face with a glance of doubt and pain that answered his question as plainly as any words could have done.

'Of course she did; and it was I that destroyed it all. I that should have been satisfied to stand still and see you happy. How you must have hated me!'

'Oh, no; indeed I did not. I was not at all

angry with you. Indeed, why should I have been? It was so kind of you, wishing to dance with me.'

'No; it was selfish—selfish in the extreme. Nothing but one thing could excuse me, and that excuse——'

'I'm sure you don't want any excuse, Mr. Fitzgerald.'

'And that excuse, Clara, was this: that I love you with all my heart. I had not strength to see you there, and not long to have you near me—not begrudge that you should dance with another. I love you with all my heart and soul. There, Lady Clara, now you know it all.'

The manner in which he made his declaration to her was almost fierce in its energy. He had stopped in the pathway, and she, unconscious of what she was doing, almost unconscious of what she was hearing, had stopped also. The mare, taking advantage of the occasion, was cropping the grass close to them. And so, for a few seconds, they stood in silence.

'Am I so bold, Lady Clara,' said he, when those few seconds had gone by—'Am I so bold that I may hope for no answer?' But still she said nothing. In lieu of speaking she uttered a long sigh; and then Fitzgerald could hear that she was sobbing.

'Oh, Clara, I love you so fondly, so dearly, so

truly!' said he in an altered voice and with sweet tenderness. 'I know my own presumption in thus speaking. I know and feel bitterly the difference in our rank.'

'I—care—nothing—for rank,' said the poor girl, sobbing through her tears. He was generous, and she at any rate would not be less so. No; at that moment, with her scanty seventeen years of experience, with her ignorance of all that the world had in it of grand and great, of high and rich, she did care nothing for rank. That Owen Fitzgerald was a gentleman of good lineage, fit to mate with a lady, that she did know; for her mother, who was a proud woman, delighted to have him in her presence. Beyond this she cared for none of the conventionalities of life. Rank! If she waited for rank, where was she to look for friends who would love her? Earls and countesses, barons and their baronesses, were scarce there where fate had placed her, under the shadow of the bleak mountains of Muskerry. Her want, her undefined want, was that some one should love her. Of all men and women whom she had hitherto known, this Owen Fitzgerald was the brightest, the kindest, the gentlest in his manner, the most pleasant to look on. And now he was there at her feet, swearing that he loved her;—and then drawing back as it were in dread of her rank. What did she care for rank?

'Clara, Clara, my Clara! Can you learn to love me?'

She had made her one little effort at speaking when she attempted to repudiate the pedestal on which he affected to place her; but after that she could for a while say no more. But she still sobbed, and still kept her eyes fixed upon the ground.

'Clara, say one word to me. Say that you do not hate me.' But just at that moment she had not one word to say.

'If you will bid me do so, I will leave this country altogether. I will go away, and I shall not much care whither. I can only stay now on condition of your loving me. I have thought of this day for the last year past, and now it has come.'

Every word that he now spoke was gospel to her. Is it not always so,—should it not be so always, when love first speaks to loving ears? What! he had loved her for that whole twelve-month that she had known him; loved her in those days when she had been wont to look up nto his face, wondering why he was so nice, so much nicer than any one else that came near her! A year was a great deal to her; and had he loved her through all those days? and after that should she banish him from her house, turn him away from his home, and drive him forth unhappy and

wretched? Ah, no! She could not be so unkind to him;—she could not be so unkind to her own heart. But still she sobbed; and still she said nothing.

In the mean time they had turned, and were now walking back towards the house, the gentle-natured mare still following at their heels. They were walking slowly—very slowly back—just creeping along the path, when they saw Lady Desmond and her son coming to meet them on the road.

'There is your mother, Clara. Say one word to me before we meet them.'

'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald; I am so frightened. What will mamma say?'

'Say about what? As yet I do not know what she may have to say. But before we meet her, may I not hope to know what her daughter will say? Answer me this, Clara. Can you, will you love me?'

There was still a pause, a moment's pause, and then some sound did fall from her lips. But yet it was so soft, so gentle, so slight, that it could hardly be said to reach even a lover's ear. Fitzgerald, however, made the most of it. Whether it were Yes, or whether it were No, he took it as being favourable, and Lady Clara Desmond gave him no sign to show that he was mistaken.

'My own, own, only loved one,' he said, embracing her as it were with his words, since the

presence of her approaching mother forbade him even to take her hand in his, 'I am happy now, whatever may occur; whatever others may say; for I know that you will be true to me. And remember this—whatever others may say, I also will be true to you. You will think of that, will you not, love?'

This time she did answer him, almost audibly. 'Yes,' she said. And then she devoted herself to a vain endeavour to remove the traces of her tears before her mother should be close to them.

Fitzgerald at once saw that such endeavour must be vain. At one time he had thought of turning away, and pretending that they had not seen the countess. But he knew that Clara would not be able to carry out any such pretence; and he reflected also that it might be just as well that Lady Desmond should know the whole at once. That she would know it, and know it soon, he was quite sure. She could learn it not only from Clara, but from himself. He could not now be there at the house without showing that he both loved and knew that he was beloved. And then why should Lady Desmond not know it? Why should he think that she would set herself against the match? He had certainly spoken to Clara of the difference in their rank; but, after all, it was no uncommon thing for an earl's daughter to marry a commoner. And in this case the earl's daughter was portion-

less, and the lover desired no portion. Owen Fitzgerald at any rate might boast that he was true and generous in his love.

So he plucked up his courage, and walked on with a smiling face to meet Lady Desmond and her son; while poor Clara crept beside him with eyes downcast, and in an agony of terror.

Lady Desmond had not left the house with any apprehension that there was aught amiss. Her son had told her that Owen had gone off 'to do the civil to Clara;' and as he did not come to the house within some twenty minutes after this, she had proposed that they would go and meet him.

'Did you tell him that I wanted him?' said the countess.

'Oh, yes, I did; and he is coming, only he would go away to Clara.'

'Then I shall scold him for his want of gallantry,' said Lady Desmond, laughing, as they walked out together from beneath the huge portal.

But as soon as she was near enough to see the manner of their gait, as they slowly came on towards her, her woman's tact told her that something was wrong;—and whispered to her also what might too probably be the nature of that something. Could it be possible, she asked herself, that such a man as Owen Fitzgerald should fall in love with such a girl as her daughter Clara?

'What shall I say to mamma?' whispered Clara to him, as they all drew near together.

'Tell her everything.'

'But, Patrick——'

'I will take him off with me if I can.' And then they were all together, standing in the road.

'I was coming to obey your behests, Lady Desmond,' said Fitzgerald, trying to look and speak as though he were at his ease.

'Coming rather tardily, I think,' said her ladyship, not altogether playfully.

'I told him you wanted him, as we were crossing to the house,' said the earl. 'Didn't I, Owen?'

'Is anything the matter with Clara?' said Lady Desmond, looking at her daughter.

'No, mamma,' said Clara; and she instantly began to sob and cry.

'What is it, sir?' And as she asked she turned to Fitzgerald; and her manner now at least had in it nothing playful.

'Lady Clara is nervous and hysterical. The excitement of the ball has perhaps been too much for her. I think, Lady Desmond, if you were to take her in with you it would be well.'

Lady Desmond looked up at him; and he then saw, for the first time, that she could if she pleased look very stern. Hitherto her face had always worn smiles, had at any rate always

been pleasing when he had seen it. He had never been intimate with her, never intimate enough to care what her face was like, till that day when he had carried her son up from the hall door to his room. Then her countenance had been all anxiety for her darling; and afterwards it had been all sweetness for her darling's friend. From that day to this present one, Lady Desmond had ever given him her sweetest smiles.

But Fitzgerald was not a man to be cowed by any woman's looks. He met hers by a full, front face in return. He did not allow his eye for a moment to fall before hers. And yet he did not look at her haughtily, or with defiance, but with an aspect which showed that he was ashamed of nothing that he had done,—whether he had done anything that he ought to be ashamed of or no.

'Clara,' said the countess, in a voice which fell with awful severity on the poor girl's ears, 'you had better return to the house with me.'

'Yes, mamma.'

'And shall I wait on you to-morrow, Lady Desmond?' said Fitzgerald, in a tone which seemed to the countess to be, in the present state of affairs, almost impertinent. The man had certainly been misbehaving himself; and yet there was not about him the slightest symptom of shame.

'Yes; no,' said the countess. 'That is, I

will write a note to you if it be necessary. Good morning.'

'Good-bye, Lady Desmond,' said Owen. And as he took off his hat with his left hand, he put out his right to shake hands with her, as was customary with him. Lady Desmond was at first inclined to refuse the courtesy; but she either thought better of such intention, or else she had not courage to maintain it; for at parting she did give him her hand.

'Good-bye, Lady Clara;' and he also shook hands with her, and it need hardly be said that there was a lover's pressure in the grasp.

'Good-bye,' said Clara, through her tears, in the saddest, soberest tone. He was going away, happy, light hearted, with nothing to trouble him. But she had to encounter that fearful task of telling her own crime. She had to depart with her mother;—her mother, who, though never absolutely unkind, had so rarely been tender with her. And then her brother——!

'Desmond,' said Fitzgerald, 'walk as far as the lodge with me like a good fellow. I have something that I want to say to you.'

The mother thought for a moment that she would call her son back; but then she bethought herself that she also might as well be without him. So the young earl, showing plainly by his eyes that he knew that much was the

matter, went back with Fitzgerald towards the lodge.

'What is it you have done now?' said the earl. The boy had some sort of an idea that the offence committed was with reference to his sister; and his tone was hardly as gracious as was usual with him.

This want of kindliness at the present moment grated on Owen's ears; but he resolved at once to tell the whole story out, and then leave it to the earl to take it in dudgeon or in brotherly friendship as he might please.

'Desmond,' said he, 'can you not guess what has passed between me and your sister?'

'I am not good at guessing,' he answered, brusquely.

'I have told her that I loved her, and would have her for my wife; and I have asked her to love me in return.'

There was an open manliness about this which almost disarmed the earl's anger. He had felt a strong attachment to Fitzgerald, and was very unwilling to give up his friendship; but, nevertheless, he had an idea that it was presumption on the part of Mr. Fitzgerald of Hap House to look up to his sister. Between himself and Owen the earl's coronet never weighed a feather; he could not have abandoned his boy's heart to the man's fellowship more thoroughly had that man been

an earl as well as himself. But he could not get over the feeling that Fitzgerald's worldly position was beneath that of his sister;—that such a marriage on his sister's part would be a mesalliance. Doubting, therefore, and in some sort dismayed—and in some sort also angry—he did not at once give any reply.

'Well, Desmond, what have you to say to it? You are the head of her family, and young as you are, it is right that I should tell you.'

'Tell me! of course you ought to tell me. I don't see what youngness has to do with it. What did she say?'

'Well, she said but little; and a man should never boast that a lady has favoured him. But she did not reject me.' He paused a moment, and then added, 'After all, honesty and truth are the best. I have reason to think that she loves me.'

The poor young lord felt that he had a double duty, and hardly knew how to perform it. He owed a duty to his sister which was paramount to all others; but then he owed a duty also to the friend who had been so kind to him. He did not know how to turn round upon him and tell him that he was not fit to marry his sister.

'And what do you say to it, Desmond?'

'I hardly know what to say. It would be a very bad match for her. You, you know, are

a capital fellow; the best fellow going. There is nobody about anywhere that I like so much.'

'In thinking of your sister, you should put that out of the question.'

'Yes; that's just it. I like you for a friend better than any one else. But Clara ought—ought—ought——'

'Ought to look higher, you would say.'

'Yes; that's just what I mean. I don't want to offend you, you know.'

'Desmond, my boy, I like you the better for it. You are a fine fellow, and I thoroughly respect you. But let us talk sensibly about this. Though your sister's rank is high——'

'Oh, I don't want to talk about rank. That's all bosh, and I don't care about it. But Hap House is a small place, and Clara wouldn't be doing well; and what's more, I am quite sure the countess will not hear of it.'

'You won't approve then?'

'No, I can't say I will.'

'Well, that is honest of you. I am very glad that I have told you at once. Clara will tell her mother, and at any rate there will be no secrets. Good-bye, old fellow.'

'Good-bye,' said the earl. Then they shook hands, and Fitzgerald rode off towards Hap House. Lord Desmond pondered over the matter some time, standing alone near the lodge; and then

walked slowly back towards the mansion. He had said that rank was all bosh; and in so saying had at the moment spoken out generously the feelings of his heart. But that feeling regarded himself rather than his sister; and if properly analyzed would merely have signified that, though proud enough of his own rank, he did not require that his friends should be of the same standing. But as regarded his sister, he certainly would not be well pleased to see her marry a small squire with a small income.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNTESS.

THE countess, as she walked back with her daughter towards the house, had to bethink herself for a minute or two as to how she should act, and what she would say. She knew, she felt that she knew, what had occurred. If her daughter's manner had not told her, the downcast eyes, the repressed sobs, the mingled look of shame and fear;—if she had not read the truth from these, she would have learned it from the tone of Fitzgerald's voice, and the look of triumph which sat upon his countenance.

And then she wondered that this should be so, seeing that she had still regarded Clara as being in all things a child; and as she thought further, she wondered at her own fatuity, in that she had allowed herself to be so grossly deceived.

'Clara,' said she, 'what is all this?'

'Oh, mamma!'

'You had better come on to the house, my

dear, and speak to me there. In the mean time, collect your thoughts, and remember this, Clara, that you have the honour of a great family to maintain.'

Poor Clara! what had the great family done for her, or how had she been taught to maintain its honour? She knew that she was an earl's daughter, and that people called her Lady Clara; whereas other young ladies were only called Miss So-and-So. But she had not been taught to separate herself from the ordinary throng of young ladies by any other distinction. Her great family nad done nothing special for her, nor placed before her for example any grandly noble deeds. At that old house at Desmond Court company was scarce, money was scarce, servants were scarce. She had been confided to the care of a very ordinary governess; and if there was about her anything that was great or good, it was intrinsically her own, and by no means due to intrinsic advantages derived from her grand family. Why should she not give what was so entirely her own to one whom she loved, to one by whom it so pleased her to be loved?

And then they entered the house, and Clara followed her mother to the countess's own small up-stairs sitting-room. The daughter did not ordinarily share this room with her mother, and when she entered it, she seldom did so with plea-

surable emotion. At the present moment she had hardly strength to close the door after her.

'And now, Clara, what is all this?' said the countess, sitting down in her accustomed chair.

'All which, mamma?' Can any one blame her in that she so far equivocated?

'Clara, you know very well what I mean. What has there been between you and Mr. Fitzgerald?'

The guilt-stricken wretch sat silent for a while, sustaining the scrutiny of her mother's gaze; and then falling from her chair on to her knees, she hid her face in her mother's lap, exclaiming, 'Oh, mamma, mamma, do not look at me like that!'

Lady Desmond's heart was somewhat softened by this appeal; nor would I have it thought that she was a cruel woman, or an unnatural mother. It had not been her lot to make an absolute, dearest, heartiest friend of her daughter, as some mothers do; a friend between whom and herself there should be, nay could be, no secrets. She could not become young again in sharing the romance of her daughter's love, in enjoying the gaieties of her daughter's balls, in planning dresses, amusements, and triumphs with her child. Some mothers can do this; and they, I think, are the mothers who enjoy most fully the delights of maternity. This was not the case with Lady Desmond; but yet she loved her child, and would

have made any reasonable sacrifice for what she regarded as that child's welfare.

'But, my dear,' she said, in a softened tone, 'you must tell me what has occurred. Do you not know that it is my duty to ask, and yours to tell me? It cannot be right that there should be any secret understanding between yourself and Mr. Fitzgerald. You know that, Clara, do you not?'

'Yes, mamma,' said Clara, remembering that her lover had bade her tell her mother everything.

'Well, my love?'

Clara's story was very simple, and did not in fact want any telling. It was merely the old well-worn tale, so common through all the world. 'He had laughed on the lass with his bonny black eye!' and she,—she was ready to go 'to the mountain to hear a love-tale!' One may say that an occurrence so very common could not want much telling.

'Mamma; he says——'

'Well, my dear?'

'He says—. Oh, mamma! I could not help it.'

'No, Clara; you certainly could not help what he might say to you. You could not refuse to listen to him. A lady in such a case, when she is on terms of intimacy with a gentleman, as you were with Mr. Fitzgerald, is bound to listen to him, and to give him an answer. You could not

help what he might say, Clara. The question now is, what answer did you give to what he said?'

Clara, who was still kneeling, looked up piteously into her mother's face, sighed bitterly, but said nothing.

'He told you that he loved you, I suppose?'

'Yes, mamma.'

'And I suppose you gave him some answer? Eh! my dear?'

The answer to this was another long sigh.

'But, Clara, you must tell me. It is absolutely necessary that I should know whether you have given him any hope, and if so, how much. Of course the whole thing must be stopped at once. Young as you are, you cannot think that a marriage with Mr. Owen Fitzgerald would be a proper match for you to make. Of course the whole thing must cease at once—at once.' Here there was another piteous sigh. 'But before I take any steps, I must know what you have said to him. Surely you have not told him that you have any feeling for him warmer than ordinary regard?'

Lady Desmond knew what she was doing very well. She was perfectly sure that her daughter had pledged her troth to Owen Fitzgerald. Indeed, if she made any mistake in the matter, it was in thinking that Clara had given a more absolute assurance of love than had in truth been

extracted from her. But she calculated, and calculated wisely, that the surest way of talking her daughter out of all hope, was to express herself as unable to believe that a child of hers would own to love for one so much beneath her, and to speak of such a marriage as a thing absolutely impossible. Her method of acting in this manner had the effect which she desired. The poor girl was utterly frightened, and began to fear that she had disgraced herself, though she knew that she dearly loved the man of whom her mother spoke so slightingly.

'Have you given him any promise, Clara?'

'Not a promise, mamma.'

'Not a promise! What then? Have you professed any regard for him?' But upon this Clara was again silent.

'Then I suppose I must believe that you have professed a regard for him—that you have promised to love him?'

'No, mamma; I have not promised anything. But when he asked me, I—I didn't—I didn't refuse him.'

It will be observed that Lady Desmond never once asked her daughter what were her feelings. It never occurred to her to inquire, even within her own heart, as to what might be most conducive to her child's happiness. She meant to do her duty by Clara, and therefore resolved at once

to put a stop to the whole affair. She now desisted from her interrogatories, and sitting silent for a while, looked out into the extent of flat ground before the house. Poor Clara the while sat silent also, awaiting her doom.

'Clara,' said the mother at last, 'all this must of course be made to cease. You are very young, very young indeed, and therefore I do not blame you. The fault is with him—with him entirely.'

'No, mamma.'

'But I say it is. He has behaved very badly, and has betrayed the trust which was placed in him when he was admitted here so intimately as Patrick's friend.'

'I am sure he has not intended to betray any trust,' said Clara, through her sobs. The conviction was beginning to come upon her that she would be forced to give up her lover; but she could not bring herself to hear so much evil spoken of him.

'He has not behaved like a gentleman,' continued the countess, looking very stern. 'And his visits here must of course be altogether discontinued. I am sorry on your brother's account, for Patrick was very fond of him——'

'Not half so fond as I am,' thought Clara to herself. But she did not dare to speak her thoughts out loud.

'But I am quite sure that your brother, young as he is, will not continue to associate with a friend who has thought so slightly of his sister's honour. Of course I shall let Mr. Fitzgerald know that he can come here no more; and all I want from you is a promise that you will on no account see him again, or hold any correspondence with him.'

That was all she wanted. But Clara, timid as she was, hesitated before she could give a promise so totally at variance with the pledge which she felt that she had given, hardly an hour since, to Fitzgerald. She knew and acknowledged to herself that she had given him a pledge, although she had given it in silence. How then was she to give this other pledge to her mother?

'You do not mean to say that you hesitate?' said Lady Desmond, looking as though she were thunderstruck at the existence of such hesitation. 'You do not wish me to suppose that you intend to persevere in such insanity? Clara, I must have from you a distinct promise,—or——'

What might be the dreadful alternative the countess did not at that minute say. She perhaps thought that her countenance might be more effective than her speech, and in thinking so she was probably right.

It must be remembered that Clara Desmond was as yet only seventeen, and that she was

young even for that age. It must be remembered also, that she knew nothing of the world's ways, of her own privileges as a creature with a soul and heart of her own, or of what might be the true extent of her mother's rights over her. She had not in her enough of matured thought to teach her to say that she would make no promise that should bind her for ever; but that for the present, in her present state, she would obey her mother's orders. And thus the promise was exacted and given.

'If I find you deceiving me, Clara,' said the countess, 'I will never forgive you.'

Hitherto, Lady Desmond may probably have played her part well;—well, considering her object. But she played it very badly in showing that she thought it possible that her daughter should play her false. It was now Clara's turn to be proud and indignant.

'Mamma!' she said, holding her head high, and looking at her mother boldly through her tears, 'I have never deceived you yet.'

'Very well, my dear. I will take steps to prevent his intruding on you any further. There may be an end of the matter now. I have no doubt that he has endeavoured to use his influence with Patrick; but I will tell your brother not to speak of the matter further.' And so saying, she dismissed her daughter.

Shortly afterwards the earl came in, and there was a conference between him and his mother. Though they were both agreed on the subject, though both were decided that it would not do for Clara to throw herself away on a county Cork squire with eight hundred a year, a cadet in his family, and a man likely to rise to nothing, still the earl would not hear him abused.

'But, Patrick, he must not come here any more,' said the countess.

'Well, I suppose not. But it will be very dull, I know that. I wish Clara hadn't made herself such an ass;' and then the boy went away, and talked kindly over the matter to his poor sister.

But the countess had another task still before her. She must make known the family resolution to Owen Fitzgerald. When her children had left her, one after the other, she sat at the window for an hour, looking at nothing, but turning over her own thoughts in her mind. Hitherto she had expressed herself as being very angry with her daughter's lover; so angry that she had said that he was faithless, a traitor, and no gentleman. She had called him a dissipated spendthrift, and had threatened his future wife, if ever he should have one, with every kind of misery that could fall to a woman's lot; but now she began to think of him perhaps more kindly.

She had been very angry with him;—and the more so because she had such cause to be angry with herself;—with her own lack of judgment, her own ignorance of the man's character, her own folly with reference to her daughter. She had never asked herself whether she loved Fitzgerald—had never done so till now. But now she knew that the sharpest blow she had received that day was the assurance that he was indifferent to herself.

She had never thought herself too old to be on an equality with him,—on such an equality in point of age as men and women feel when they learn to love each other; and therefore it had not occurred to her that he could regard her daughter as other than a child. To Lady Desmond, Clara was a child; how then could she be more to him? And yet now it was too plain that he had looked on Clara as a woman. In what light then must he have thought of that woman's mother? And so, with saddened heart, but subdued anger, she continued to gaze through the window till all without was dusk and dark.

There can be to a woman no remembrance of age so strong as that of seeing a daughter go forth to the world a married woman. If that does not tell the mother that the time of her own youth has passed away, nothing will ever bring the tale home. It had not quite come to this

The knowledge of this should, I think, have protected her from your advances.'

'But I absolutely deny any such knowledge. And more than that, I think that you are greatly mistaken as to her character.'

'Mistaken, sir, as to my own daughter?'

'Yes, Lady Desmond; I think you are. I think——'

'On such a matter, Mr. Fitzgerald, I need not trouble you for an expression of your thoughts. Nor need we argue that subject any further. You must of course be aware that all ideas of any such marriage as this must be laid aside.'

'On what grounds, Lady Desmond?'

Now this appeared to the countess to be rather impudent on the part of the young squire. The reasons why he, Owen Fitzgerald of Hap House, should not marry a daughter of an Earl of Desmond, seemed to her to be so conspicuous and conclusive, that it could hardly be necessary to enumerate them. And such as they were, it might not be pleasant to announce them in his hearing. But though Owen Fitzgerald was so evidently an unfit suitor for an earl's daughter, it might still be possible that he should be acceptable to an earl's widow. Ah! if it might be possible to teach him the two lessons at the same time!

'On what grounds, Mr. Fitzgerald!' she said, repeating his question; 'surely I need hardly

tell you. Did not my son say the same thing to you yesterday, as he walked with you down the avenue?'

'Yes; he told me candidly that he looked higher for his sister; and I liked him for his candour. But that is no reason that I should agree with him; or, which is much more important, that his sister should do so. If she thinks that she can be happy in such a home as I can give her, I do not know why he, or why you should object.'

'You think, then, that I might give her to a blacksmith, if she herself were mad enough to wish it?'

'I thank you for the compliment, Lady Desmond.'

'You have driven me to it, sir.'

'I believe it is considered in the world,' said he,—'that is, in our country, that the one great difference is between gentlemen and ladies, and those who are not gentlemen or ladies. A lady does not degrade herself if she marry a gentleman, even though that gentleman's rank be less high than her own.'

'It is not a question of degradation, but of prudence;—of the ordinary caution which I, as a mother, am bound to use as regards my daughter. Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald!' and she now altered her tone as she spoke to him; 'we have all been so pleased to know you, so happy to have you there;

why have you destroyed all this by one half-hour's folly?'

'The folly, as you call it, Lady Desmond, has been premeditated for the last twelve months.'

'For twelve months!' said she, taken absolutely by surprise, and in her surprise believing him.

'Yes, for twelve months. Ever since I began to know your daughter, I have loved her. You say that your daughter is a child. I also thought so this time last year, in our last winter holidays. I thought so then; and though I loved her as a child, I kept it to myself. Now she is a woman, and so thinking I have spoken to her as one. I have told her that I loved her, as I now tell you that come what may I must continue to do so. Had she made me believe that I was indifferent to her, absence, perhaps, and distance might have taught me to forget her. But such, I think, is not the case.'

'And you must forget her now.'

'Never, Lady Desmond.'

'Nonsense, sir. A child that does not know her own mind, that thinks of a lover as she does of some new toy, whose first appearance in the world was only made the other night at your cousin's house! you ought to feel ashamed of such a passion, Mr. Fitzgerald.'

'I am very far from being ashamed of it, Lady Desmond.'

'At any rate, let me tell you this. My daughter has promised me most solemnly that she will neither see you again, nor have any correspondence with you. And this I know of her, that her word is sacred. I can excuse her on account of her youth; and, young as she is, she already sees her own folly in having allowed you so to address her. But for you, Mr. Fitzgerald, under all the circumstances I can make no excuse for you. Is yours, do you think, the sort of house to which a young girl should be brought as a bride? Is your life, are your companions of that kind which could most profit her? I am sorry that you drive me to remind you of these things.'

His face became very dark, and his brow stern as his sins were thus cast into his teeth.

'And from what you know of me, Lady Desmond,' he said,—and as he spoke he assumed a dignity of demeanour which made her more inclined to love him than ever she had been before,—'do you think that I should be the man to introduce a young wife to such companions as those to whom you allude? Do you not know, are you not sure in your own heart, that my marriage with your daughter would instantly put an end to all that?'

'Whatever may be my own thoughts, and they are not likely to be unfavourable to you—for Patrick's sake, I mean; but whatever may be my

own thoughts, I will not subject my daughter to such a risk. And, Mr. Fitzgerald, you must allow me to say, that your income is altogether insufficient, for her wants and your own. She has no fortune——'

'I want none with her.'

'And—— but I will not argue the matter with you. I did not come to argue it, but to tell you, with as little offence as may be possible, that such a marriage is absolutely impossible. My daughter herself has already abandoned all thoughts of it.'

'Her thoughts then must be wonderfully under her own control. Much more so than mine are.'

'Lord Desmond, you may be sure, will not hear of it.'

'Lord Desmond cannot at present be less of a child than his sister.'

'I don't know that, Mr. Fitzgerald.'

'At any rate, Lady Desmond, I will not put my happiness, nor as far as I am concerned in it, his sister's happiness, at his disposal. When I told her that I loved her, I did not speak, as you seem to think, from an impulse of the moment. I spoke because I loved her; and as I love her, I shall of course try to win her. Nothing can absolve me from my engagement to her but her marriage with another person.'

The countess had once or twice made small

efforts to come to terms of peace with him; or rather to a truce, under which there might still be some friendship between them,—accompanied, however, by a positive condition that Clara should be omitted from any participation in it. She would have been willing to say, 'Let all this be forgotten, only for some time to come you and Clara cannot meet each other.' But Fitzgerald would by no means agree to such terms; and the countess was obliged to leave his house, having in effect only thrown down a gauntlet of battle; having in vain attempted to extend over it an olive-branch of peace.

He helped her, however, into her little pony carriage, and at parting she gave him her hand. He just touched it, and then, taking off his hat, bowed courteously to her as she drove from his door.

CHAPTER V.

THE FITZGERALDS OF CASTLE RICHMOND.

WHAT idea of carrying out his plans may have been prevalent in Fitzgerald's mind when he was so defiant of the countess, it may be difficult to say. Probably he had no idea, but felt at the spur of the moment that it would be weak to yield. The consequence was, that when Lady Desmond left Hap House, he was obliged to consider himself as being at feud with the family.

The young lord he did see once again during the holidays, and even entertained him at Hap House; but the earl's pride would not give way an inch.

'Much as I like you, Owen, I cannot do anything but oppose it. It would be a bad match for my sister, and so you'd feel if you were in my place.' And then Lord Desmond went back to Eton.

After that they none of them met for many months. During this time life went on in a very triste manner at Desmond Court. Lady Desmond

felt that she had done her duty by her daughter; but her tenderness to Clara was not increased by the fact that her foolish attachment had driven Fitzgerald from the place. As for Clara herself, she not only kept her word, but rigidly resolved to keep it. Twice she returned unopened, and without a word of notice, letters which Owen had caused to be conveyed to her hand. It was not that she had ceased to love him, but she had high ideas of truth and honour, and would not break her word. Perhaps she was sustained in her misery by the remembrance that heroines are always miserable.

And then the orgies at Hap House became hotter and faster. Hitherto there had perhaps been more smoke than fire, more calumny than sin. And Fitzgerald, when he had intimated that the presence of a young wife would save him from it all, had not boasted falsely. But now that his friends had turned their backs upon him, that he was banished from Desmond Court, and twitted with his iniquities at Castle Richmond, he threw off all restraint, and endeavoured to enjoy himself in his own way. So the orgies became fast and furious; all which of course reached the ears of poor Clara Desmond.

During the summer holidays, Lord Desmond was not at home, but Owen Fitzgerald was also away. He had gone abroad, perhaps with the conviction

that it would be well that he and the Desmonds should not meet; and he remained abroad till the hunting season again commenced. Then the winter came again, and he and Lord Desmond used to meet in the field. There they would exchange courtesies, and, to a certain degree, show that they were intimate. But all the world knew that the old friendship was over. And, indeed, all the world—all the county Cork world—soon knew the reason. And so we are brought down to the period at which our story was to begin.

We have hitherto said little or nothing of Castle Richmond and its inhabitants; but it is now time that we should do so, and we will begin with the heir of the family. At the period of which we are speaking, Herbert Fitzgerald had just returned from Oxford, having completed his affairs there in a manner very much to the satisfaction of his father, mother, and sisters; and to the unqualified admiration of his aunt, Miss Letty. I am not aware that the heads of colleges, and supreme synod of Dons had signified by any general expression of sentiment, that Herbert Fitzgerald had so conducted himself as to be a standing honour and perpetual glory to the University; but at Castle Richmond it was all the same as though they had done so. There are some kindly-hearted, soft-minded parents, in whose estimation not to have

fallen into disgrace shows the highest merit on the part of their children. Herbert had not been rusticated; had not got into debt, at least not to an extent that had been offensive to his father's pocket; he had not been plucked. Indeed, he had taken honours, in some low unnoticed degree;—unnoticed, that is, at Oxford; but noticed at Castle Richmond by an ovation—almost by a triumph.

But Herbert Fitzgerald was a son to gladden a father's heart and a mother's eye. He was not handsome, as was his cousin Owen; not tall and stalwart and godlike in his proportions, as was the reveller of Hap House; but nevertheless, and perhaps not the less, was he pleasant to look on. He was smaller and darker than his cousin; but his eyes were bright and full of goodhumour. He was clean looking and clean made; pleasant and courteous in all his habits; attached to books in a moderate, easy way, but no bookworm; he had a gentle affection for bindings and titlepages; was fond of pictures, of which it might be probable that he would some day know more than he did at present; addicted to Gothic architecture, and already proprietor of the germ of what was to be a collection of coins.

Owen Fitzgerald had called him a prig; but Herbert was no prig. Nor yet was he a pedant; which word might, perhaps, more nearly have

expressed his cousin's meaning. He liked little bits of learning, the easy outsides and tags of classical acquirements, which come so easily within the scope of the memory when a man has passed some ten years between a public school and a university. But though he did love to chew the cud of these morsels of Attic grass which he had cropped, certainly without any great or sustained effort, he had no desire to be ostentatious in doing so, or to show off more than he knew. Indeed, now that he was away from his college friends, he was rather ashamed of himself than otherwise when scraps of quotations would break forth from him in his own despite. Looking at his true character, it was certainly unjust to call him either a prig or a pedant.

He was fond of the society of ladies, and was a great favourite with his sisters, who thought that every girl who saw him must instantly fall in love with him. He was goodnatured, and, as the only son of a rich man, was generally well provided with money. Such a brother is usually a favourite with his sisters. He was a great favourite too with his aunt, whose heart, however, was daily sinking into her shoes through the effect of one great terror which harassed her respecting him. She feared that he had become a Puseyite. Now that means much with some ladies in England; but with most ladies of the

Protestant religion in Ireland, it means, one may almost say, the very Father of Mischief himself. In their minds, the pope, with his lady of Babylon, his college of cardinals, and all his community of pinchbeck saints, holds a sort of second head-quarters of his own at Oxford. And there his high priest is supposed to be one wicked infamous Pusey, and his worshippers are wicked infamous Puseyites. Now, Miss Letty Fitzgerald was strong on this subject, and little inklings had fallen from her nephew which robbed her of much of her peace of mind.

It is impossible that these volumes should be graced by any hero, for the story does not admit of one. But if there were to be a hero, Herbert Fitzgerald would be the man.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald at this period was an old man in appearance, though by no means an old man in years, being hardly more than fifty. Why he should have withered away as it were into premature grayness, and loss of the muscle and energy of life, none knew; unless, indeed, his wife did know. But so it was. He had, one may say, all that a kind fortune could give him. He had a wife who was devoted to him; he had a son on whom he doted, and of whom all men said all good things; he had two sweet, happy daughters; he had a pleasant house, a fine estate, position and rank in the world. Had it so pleased

him, he might have sat in Parliament without any of the trouble, and with very little of the expense, which usually attends aspirants for that honour. And, as it was, he might hope to see his son in Parliament within a year or two. For among other possessions of the Fitzgerald family was the land on which stands the borough of Kilcommon, a borough to which the old Reform Bill was merciful, as it was to so many others in the south of Ireland.

Why, then, should Sir Thomas Fitzgerald be a silent, melancholy man, confining himself for the last year or two almost entirely to his own study; giving up to his steward the care even of his own demesne and farm; never going to the houses of his friends, and rarely welcoming them to his; rarely as it was, and never as it would have been, had he been always allowed to have his own way?

People in the surrounding neighbourhood had begun to say that Sir Thomas's sorrow had sprung from shortness of cash, and that money was not so easily to be had at Castle Richmond now-a-days as was the case some ten years since. If this were so, the dearth of that very useful article could not have in any degree arisen from extravagance. It was well known that Sir Thomas's estate was large, being of a value, according to that public and well-authenticated rent-roll which

the neighbours of a rich man always carry in their heads, amounting to twelve or fourteen thousand a year. Now Sir Thomas had come into the unencumbered possession of this at an early age, and had never been extravagant himself or in his family. His estates were strictly entailed, and therefore, as he had only a life interest in them, it of course was necessary that he should save money and insure his life, to make provision for his daughters. But by a man of his habits and his property, such a burden as this could hardly have been accounted any burden at all. That he did, however, in this mental privacy of his carry some heavy burden, was made plain enough to all who knew him.

And Lady Fitzgerald was in many things a counterpart of her husband, not in health so much as in spirits. She, also, was old for her age, and wobegone, not only in appearance, but also in the inner workings of her heart. But then it was known of her that she had undergone deep sorrows in her early youth, which had left their mark upon her brow, and their trace upon her inmost thoughts. Sir Thomas had not been her first husband. When very young, she had been married, or rather, given in marriage, to a man who in a very few weeks after that ill-fated union had shown himself to be perfectly unworthy of her.

Her story, or so much of it as was known to

her friends, was this. Her father had been a clergyman in Dorsetshire, burdened with a small income, and blessed with a large family. She who afterwards became Lady Fitzgerald was his eldest child; and, as Miss Wainwright—Mary Wainwright—had grown up to be the possessor of almost perfect female loveliness. While she was yet very young, a widower with an only boy, a man who at that time was considerably less than thirty, had come into her father's parish, having rented there a small hunting-box. This gentleman—we will so call him, in lack of some other term—immediately became possessed of an establishment, at any rate eminently respectable. He had three hunters, two grooms, and a gig; and on Sundays went to church with a prayer-book in his hand, and a black coat on his back. What more could be desired to prove his respectability?

He had not been there a month before he was intimate in the parson's house. Before two months had passed he was engaged to the parson's daughter. Before the full quarter had flown by, he and the parson's daughter were man and wife; and in five months from the time of his first appearance in the Dorsetshire parish, he had flown from his creditors, leaving behind him his three horses, his two grooms, his gig, his wife, and his little boy.

The Dorsetshire neighbours, and especially the Dorsetshire ladies, had at first been loud in their envious exclamations as to Miss Wainwright's luck. The parson and the parson's wife, and poor Mary Wainwright herself, had, according to the sayings of that moment prevalent in the county, used most unjustifiable wiles in trapping this poor rich stranger. Miss Wainwright, as they all declared, had not clothes to her back when she went to him. The matter had been got up and managed in most indecent hurry, so as to rob the poor fellow of any chance of escape. And thus all manner of evil things were said, in which envy of the bride and pity of the bridegroom were equally commingled.

But when the sudden news came that Mr. Talbot had bolted, and when after a week's inquiry no one could tell whither Mr. Talbot had gone, the objurgations of the neighbours were expressed in a different tone. Then it was declared that Mr. Wainwright had sacrificed his beautiful child without making any inquiry as to the character of the stranger to whom he had so recklessly given her. The pity of the county fell to the share of the poor beautiful girl, whose welfare and happiness were absolutely ruined; and the parson was pulled to pieces for his sordid parsimony in having endeavoured to rid himself in so disgraceful a manner of the charge of one of his children.

It would be beyond the scope of my story to tell here of the anxious family councils which were held in that parsonage parlour, during the time of that daughter's courtship. There had been misgivings as to the stability of the wooer; there had been an anxious wish not to lose for the penniless daughter the advantage of a wealthy match; the poor girl herself had been much cross-questioned as to her own feelings. But let them have been right, or let them have been wrong at that parsonage, the matter was settled, very speedily as we have seen; and Mary Wainwright became Mrs. Talbot when she was still almost a child.

And then Mr. Talbot bolted; and it became known to the Dorsetshire world that he had not paid a shilling for rent, or for butcher's meat for his human family, or for oats for his equine family, during the whole period of his sojourn at Chevy-chase Lodge. Grand references had been made to a London banker, which had been answered by assurances that Mr. Talbot was as good as the Bank of England. But it turned out that the assurances were forged, and that the letter of inquiry addressed to the London banker had been intercepted. In short, it was all ruin, roguery, and wretchedness.

And very wretched they all were, the old father, the young bride, and all that parsonage

household. After much inquiry something at last was discovered. The man had a sister whose whereabouts was made out; and she consented to receive the child—on condition that the bairn should not come to her empty-handed. In order to get rid of this burden, Mr. Wainwright with great difficulty made up thirty pounds.

And then it was discovered that the man's name was not Talbot. What it was did not become known in Dorsetshire, for the poor wife resumed her maiden name—with very little right to do so, as her kind neighbours observed—till fortune so kindly gave her the privilege of bearing another honourably before the world.

And then other inquiries, and almost endless search was made with reference to that miscreant —not quite immediately—for at the moment of the blow such search seemed to be but of little use; but after some months, when the first stupor arising from their grief had passed away, and when they once more began to find that the fields were still green, and the sun warm, and that God's goodness was not at an end.

And the search was made not so much with reference to him as to his fate, for tidings had reached the parsonage that he was no more. The period was that in which Paris was occupied by the allied forces, when our general, the Duke of Wellington, was paramount in the French capital,

and the Tuileries and Champs Elysées were swarming with Englishmen.

Report at the time was brought home that the soidisant Talbot, fighting his battles under the name of Chichester, had been seen and noted in the gambling-houses of Paris; that he had been forcibly extruded from some such chamber for non-payment of a gambling debt; that he had made one in a violent fracas which had subsequently taken place in the French streets; and that his body had afterwards been identified in the Morgue.

Such was the story which bit by bit reached Mr. Wainwright's ears, and at last induced him to go over to Paris, so that the absolute and proof-sustained truth of the matter might be ascertained, and made known to all men. The poor man's search was difficult and weary. The ways of Paris were not then so easy to an Englishman as they have since become, and Mr. Wainwright could not himself speak a word of French. But nevertheless he did learn much; so much as to justify him, as he thought, in instructing his daughter to wear a widow's cap. That Talbot had been kicked out of a gambling-house in the Rue Richelieu was absolutely proved. An acquaintance who had been with him in Dorsetshire on his first arrival there had seen this done; and bore testimony of the fact that the man so treated was the man who had taken the

hunting-lodge in England. This same acquaintance had been one of the party adverse to Talbot in the row which had followed, and he could not, therefore, be got to say that he had seen him dead. But other evidence had gone to show that the man who had been so extruded was the man who had perished; and the French lawyer whom Mr. Wainwright had employed, at last assured the poor broken-hearted clergyman that he might look upon it as proved. 'Had he not been dead,' said the lawyer, 'the inquiry which has been made would have traced him out alive.' And thus his daughter was instructed to put on her widow's cap, and her mother again called her Mrs. Talbot.

Indeed, at that time they hardly knew what to call her, or how to act in the wisest and most befitting manner. Among those who had truly felt for them in their misfortunes, who had really pitied them and encountered them with loving sympathy, the kindest and most valued friend had been the vicar of a neighbouring parish. He himself was a widower without children; but living with him at that time, and reading with him, was a young gentleman whose father was just dead, a baronet of large property, and an Irishman. This was Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

It need not now be told how this young man's

sympathies were also excited, or how sympathy had grown into love. In telling our tale we fain would not dwell much on the cradledom of our Meleager. The young widow in her widow's cap grew to be more lovely than she had ever been before her miscreant husband had seen her. They who remembered her in those days told wondrous tales of her surprising loveliness;—how men from London would come down to see her in the parish church; how she was talked of as the Dorsetshire Venus, only that unlike Venus she would give a hearing to no man; how sad she was as well as lovely; and how impossible it was found to win a smile from her.

But though she could not smile, she could love; and at last she accepted the love of the young baronet. And then the father, who had so grossly neglected his duty when he gave her in marriage to an unknown rascally adventurer, endeavoured to atone for such neglect by the severest caution with reference to this new suitor. Further inquiries were made. Sir Thomas went over to Paris himself with that other clergyman. Lawyers were employed in England to sift out the truth; and at last, by the united agreement of some dozen men, all of whom were known to be worthy, it was decided that Talbot was dead, and that his widow was free to choose another mate. Another mate she had already

chosen, and immediately after this she was married to Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

Such was the early life-story of Lady Fitzgerald; and as this was widely known to those who lived around her—for how could such a life-story as that remain untold?—no one wondered why she should be gentle and silent in her life's course. That she had been an excellent wife, a kind and careful mother, a loving neighbour to the poor, and courteous neighbour to the rich, all the county Cork admitted. She had lived down envy by her gentleness and soft humility, and every one spoke of her and her retiring habits with sympathy and reverence.

But why should her husband also be so sad—nay, so much sadder? For Lady Fitzgerald, though she was gentle and silent, was not a sorrowful woman—otherwise than she was made so by seeing her husband's sorrow. She had been to him a loving partner, and no man could more tenderly have returned a wife's love than he had done. One would say that all had run smoothly at Castle Richmond since the house had been made happy, after some years of waiting, by the birth of an eldest child and heir. But, nevertheless, those who knew most of Sir Thomas saw that there was a peacock on the wall.

It is only necessary to say further a word or two as to the other ladies of the family, and

hardly necessary to say that. Mary and Emmeline Fitzgerald were both cheerful girls. I do not mean that they were boisterous laughers, that in waltzing they would tear round a room like human steam-engines, that they rode well to hounds as some young ladies now-a-days do—and some young ladies do ride very well to hounds; nor that they affected slang, and decked their persons with odds and ends of masculine costume. In saying that they were cheerful, I by no means wish it to be understood that they were loud.

They were pretty, too, but neither of them lovely, as their mother had been—hardly, indeed, so lovely as that pale mother was now, even in these latter days. Ah, how very lovely that pale mother was, as she sat still and silent in her own place on the small sofa by the slight, small table which she used! Her hair was gray, and her eyes sunken, and her lips thin and bloodless; but yet never shall I see her equal for pure feminine beauty, for form and outline, for passionless grace, and sweet, gentle, womanly softness. All her sad tale was written upon her brow; all its sadness and all its poetry. One could read there the fearful, all but fatal danger to which her childhood had been exposed, and the daily thanks with which she praised her God for having spared and saved her.

But, I am running back to the mother in attempting to say a word about her children. Of the two, Emmeline, the younger, was the more like her; but no one who was a judge of outline could imagine that Emmeline, at her mother's age, would ever have her mother's beauty. Nevertheless, they were fine, handsome girls, more popular in the neighbourhood than any of their neighbours, well educated, sensible, feminine, and useful; fitted to be the wives of good men.

And what shall I say of Miss Letty? She was ten years older than her brother, and as strong as a horse. She was great at walking, and recommended that exercise strongly to all young ladies as an antidote to every ill, from love to chilblains. She was short and dapper in person; not ugly, excepting that her nose was long, and had a little bump or excrescence at the end of it. She always wore a bonnet, even at meal times; and was supposed by those who were not intimately acquainted with the mysteries of her toilet, to sleep in it; often, indeed, she did sleep in it, and gave unmusical evidence of her doing so. She was not illnatured; but so strongly prejudiced on many points as to be equally disagreeable as though she were so. With her, as with the world in general, religion was the point on which those prejudices were

the strongest; and the peculiar bent they took was horror and hatred of popery. As she lived in a country in which the Roman Catholic was the religion of all the poorer classes, and of very many persons who were not poor, there was ample scope in which her horror and hatred could work. She was charitable to a fault, and would exercise that charity for the good of Papists as willingly as for the good of Protestants; but in doing so she always remembered the good cause. She always clogged the flannel petticoat with some Protestant teaching, or burdened the little coat and trousers with the pains and penalties of idolatry.

When her brother had married the widow Talbot, her anger with him and her hatred towards her sister-in-law had been extreme. But time and conviction had worked in her so thorough a change, that she now almost worshipped the very spot in which Lady Fitzgerald habitually sat. She had the faculty to know and recognize goodness when she saw it, and she had known and recognized it in her brother's wife.

Him also, her brother himself, she warmly loved and greatly reverenced. She deeply grieved over his state of body and mind, and would have given all she ever had, even her very self, to restore him to health and happiness.

The three children of course she loved, and petted, and scolded; and as children bothered them out of all their peace and quietness. To the girls she was still almost as great a torment as in their childish days. Nevertheless, they still loved, and sometimes obeyed her. Of Herbert she stood somewhat more in awe. He was the future head of the family, and already a Bachelor of Arts. In a very few years he would probably assume the higher title of a married man of arts, she thought; and perhaps the less formidable one of a member of Parliament also. Him, therefore, she treated with deference. But, alas! what if he should become a Puseyite!

CHAPTER VI.

THE KANTURK HOTEL, SOUTH MAIN STREET, CORK.

ALL the world no doubt knows South Main Street in the city of Cork. In the 'ould' ancient days, South and North Main Streets formed the chief thoroughfare through the city, and hence of course they derived their names. But now, since Patrick Street, and Grand Parade, and the South Mall have grown up, Main Street has but little honour. It is crowded with second-rate tobacconists and third-rate grocers; the houses are dirty, and the street is narrow; fashionable ladies never visit it for their shopping, nor would any respectable commercial gent stop at an inn within its purlieus.

But here in South Main Street, at the time of which I am writing, there was an inn, or public-house, called the Kanturk Hotel. In dear old Ireland they have some foibles, and one of them is a passion for high nomenclature. Those who are accustomed to the sort of establishments

which are met with in England, and much more in Germany and Switzerland, under the name of hotels, might be surprised to see the place in South Main Street which had been dignified with the same appellation. It was a small, dingy house of three stories, the front door of which was always open, and the passage strewed with damp, dirty straw. On the left-hand side as you entered was a sitting-room, or coffee-room as it was announced to be by an appellation painted on the door. There was but one window to the room, which looked into the street, and was always clouded by a dingy-red curtain. The floor was uncarpeted, nearly black with dirt, and usually half covered with fragments of damp straw brought into it by the feet of customers. A strong smell of hot whisky and water always prevailed, and the straggling mahogany table in the centre of the room, whose rickety legs gave way and came off whenever an attempt was made to move it, was covered by small greasy circles, the impressions of the bottoms of tumblers which had been made by the overflowing tipple. Over the chimney there was a round mirror, the framework of which was bedizened with all manner of would-be gilt ornaments, which had been cracked, and twisted, and mended till it was impossible to know what they had been intended to represent; and the whole affair had become a

huge receptacle of dust, which fell in flakes upon the chimney-piece when it was invaded. There was a second table opposite the window, more rickety than that in the centre; and against the wall opposite to the fireplace there was an old sideboard, in the drawers of which Tom, the one-eyed waiter, kept knives and forks, and candle-ends, and bits of bread, and dusters. There was a sour smell, as of old rancid butter, about the place, to which the guests sometimes objected, little inclined as they generally were to be fastidious. But this was a tender subject, and not often alluded to by those who wished to stand well in the good graces of Tom. Many things much annoyed Tom; but nothing annoyed him so fearfully as any assertion that the air of the Kanturk Hotel was not perfectly sweet and wholesome.

Behind the coffee-room was the bar, from which Fanny O'Dwyer dispensed dandies of punch and goes of brandy to her father's customers from Kanturk. For at this, as at other similar public-houses in Irish towns, the greater part of the custom on which the publican depends came to him from the inhabitants of one particular country district. A large four-wheeled vehicle, called a long car, which was drawn by three horses, and travelled over a mountain road at the rate of four Irish miles an hour, came daily from Kanturk to Cork, and

daily returned. This public conveyance stopped in Cork at the Kanturk Hotel, and was owned by the owner of that house, in partnership with a brother in the same trade located in Kanturk. It was Mr. O'Dwyer's business to look after this concern, to see to the passengers and the booking, the oats, and hay, and stabling, while his well-known daughter, the charming Fanny O'Dwyer, took care of the house, and dispensed brandy and whisky to the customers from Kanturk.

To tell the truth, the bar was a much more alluring place than the coffee-room, and Fanny O'Dwyer a more alluring personage than Tom, the one-eyed waiter. This Elysium, however, was not open to all comers—not even to all comers from Kanturk. Those who had the right of entry well new their privilege; and so also did they who had not. This sanctum was screened off from the passage by a window, which opened upwards conveniently, as is customary with bar-windows; but the window was blinded inside by a red curtain, so that Fanny's stool near the counter, her father's wooden arm-chair, and the old horsehair sofa on which favoured guests were wont to sit, were not visible to the public at large.

Of the up-stair portion of this establishment it is not necessary to say much. It professed to be an hotel, and accommodation for sleeping was to

be obtained there; but the well-being of the house depended but little on custom of this class.

Nor need I say much of the kitchen, a graphic description of which would not be pleasing. Here lived a cook, who, together with Tom the waiter, did all that servants had to do at the Kanturk Hotel. From this kitchen lumps of beef, mutton chops, and potatoes did occasionally emanate, all perfumed with plenteous onions; as also did fried eggs, with bacon an inch thick, and other culinary messes too horrible to be thought of. But drinking rather than eating was the staple of this establishment. Such was the Kanturk Hotel in South Main Street, Cork.

It was on a disagreeable, cold, sloppy, raw, winter evening—an evening drizzling sometimes with rain, and sometimes with sleet—that an elderly man was driven up to the door of the hotel on a one-horse car—or jingle, as such conveniences were then called in the south of Ireland. He seemed to know the house, for with his outside coat all dripping as it was he went direct to the bar-window, and as Fanny O'Dwyer opened the door he walked into that warm precinct. There he encountered a gentleman, dressed one would say rather beyond the merits of the establishment, who was taking his ease at full length on Fanny's sofa, and drinking some hot compound

which was to be seen in a tumbler on the chimney-shelf just above his head. It was now six o'clock in the evening, and the gentleman no doubt had dined.

'Well, Aby; here I am, as large as life, but as cold as death. Ugh; what an affair that coach is! Fanny, my best of darlings, give me a drop of something that's best for warming the cockles of an old man's heart.'

'A young wife then is the best thing in life to do that, Mr. Mollett,' said Fanny, sharply, preparing, however, at the same time some mixture which might be taken more instantaneously.

'The governor's had enough of that receipt already,' said the man on the sofa; or rather the man now off the sofa, for he had slowly arisen to shake hands with the new comer.

This latter person proceeded to divest himself of his dripping greatcoat. 'Here, Tom,' said he, 'bring your old Cyclops eye to bear this way, will you. Go and hang that up in the kitchen; not too near the fire now; and get me something to eat: none of your mutton chops; but a beef-steak if there is such a thing in this benighted place. Well, Aby, how goes on the war?'

It was clear that the elderly gentleman was quite at home in his present quarters; for Tom, far from resenting such impertinence, as he would immediately have done had it proceeded from an

ordinary Kanturk customer, declared 'that he would do his honour's bidding av there was such a thing as a beef-steak to be had anywhere's in the city of Cork.'

And indeed the elderly gentleman was a person of whom one might premise, judging by his voice and appearance, that he would probably make himself at home anywhere. He was a hale hearty man, of perhaps sixty years of age, who had certainly been handsome, and was even now not the reverse. Or rather, one may say, that he would have been so were it not that there was a low, restless, cunning legible in his mouth and eyes, which robbed his countenance of all manliness. He was a hale man, and well preserved for his time of life; but nevertheless, the extra rubicundity of his face, and certain incipient pimply excrescences about his nose, gave tokens that he lived too freely. He had lived freely; and were it not that his constitution had been more than ordinarily strong, and that constant exercise and exposure to air had much befriended him, those pimply excrescences would have shown themselves in a more advanced stage. Such was Mr. Mollett senior—Mr. Matthew Mollett, with whom it will be soon our fate to be better acquainted.

The gentleman who had slowly risen from the sofa was his son, Mr. Mollett junior—Mr. Abraham

Mollett, with whom also we shall become better acquainted. The father has been represented as not being exactly prepossessing; but the son, according to my ideas, was much less so. He also would be considered handsome by some persons—by women chiefly of the Fanny O'Dwyer class, whose eyes are capable of recognizing what is good in shape and form, but cannot recognize what is good in tone and character. Mr. Abraham Mollett was perhaps some thirty years of age, or rather more. He was a very smart man, with a profusion of dark, much-oiled hair, with dark, copious mustachoes—and mustachoes being then not common as they are now, added to his otherwise rakish, vulgar appearance—with various rings on his not well-washed hands, with a frilled front to his not lately washed shirt, with a velvet collar to his coat, and patent-leather boots upon his feet.

Free living had told more upon him, young as he was, than upon his father. His face was not yet pimply, but it was red and bloated; his eyes were bloodshot and protruding; his hand on a morning was unsteady; and his passion for brandy was stronger than that for beef-steaks; whereas his father's appetite for solid food had never flagged. Those who were intimate with the family, and were observant of men, were wont to remark that the son would never fill the father's

shoes. These family friends, I may perhaps add, were generally markers at billiard-tables, head grooms at race-courses, or other men of that sharp, discerning class. Seeing that I introduce these gentlemen to my readers at the Kanturk Hotel, in South Main Street, Cork, it may be perhaps as well to add that they were both Englishmen; so that mistakes on that matter may be avoided.

The father, as soon as he had rid himself of his upper coat, his dripping hat, and his goloshes, stood up with his back to the bar-room fire, with his hands in his trousers-pockets, and the tails of his coat stuck inside his arms.

'I tell you, Aby, it was cold enough outside that infernal coach. I'm blessed if I've a morsel of feeling in my toes yet. Why the d—— don't they continue the railway on to Cork? It's as much as a man's life is worth to travel in that sort of way at this time of the year.'

'You'll have more of it then if you intend going out of town to-morrow,' said the son.

'Well; I don't know that I shall. I shall take a day to consider of it I think.'

'Consideration be bothered,' said Mollett junior; 'strike when the iron's hot; that's my motto.'

The father here turned half round to his son and winked at him, nodding his head slightly towards the girl, thereby giving token that,

according to his ideas, the conversation could not be discreetly carried on before a third person.

'All right,' said the son, lifting his joram of brandy and water to his mouth; an action in which he was immediately imitated by his father, who had now received the means of doing so from the hands of the fair Fanny.

'And how about a bed, my dear?' said Mollett senior; 'that's a matter of importance too; or will be when we are getting on to the little hours.'

'Oh, we won't turn you out, Mr. Mollett,' said Fanny; 'we'll find a bed for you, never fear.'

'That's all right then, my little Venus. And now if I had some dinner I'd sit down and make myself comfortable for the evening.'

As he said this, Fanny slipped out of the room, and ran down into the kitchen to see what Tom and the cook were doing. The Molletts, father and son, were rather more than ordinary good customers at the Kanturk Hotel, and it was politic therefore to treat them well. Mr. Mollett junior, moreover, was almost more than a customer; and for the sake of the son Fanny was anxious that the father should be well treated.

'Well, governor, and what have you done?' said the younger man in a low voice, jumping up from his seat as soon as the girl had left them alone.

'Well, I've got the usual remittance from the man in Bucklersbury. That was all as right as a trivet.'

'And no more than that? Then I tell you what it is; we must be down on him at once.'

'But you forget that I got as much more last month, out of the usual course. Come, Aby, don't you be unreasonable.'

'Bother—I tell you, governor, if he don't——' And then Miss O'Dwyer returned to her sanctum, and the rest of the conversation was necessarily postponed.

'He's managed to get you a lovely steak, Mr. Mollett,' said Fanny, pronouncing the word as though it were written 'steek.' 'And we've beautiful pickled walnuts; haven't we, Mr. Aby? and there'll be kidneys biled' (meaning potatoes) 'by the time the "steek's" ready. You like it with the gravy in, don't you, Mr. Mollett?' And as she spoke she drew a quartern of whisky for two of Beamish and Crawford's draymen, who stood outside in the passage and drank it at the bar.

The lovely 'steek' with the gravy in it—that is to say, nearly raw—was now ready, and father and son adjourned to the next room. 'Well, Tom, my lad of wax; and how's the world using you?' said Mr. Mollett senior.

'There ain't much difference then,' said Tom;

'I ain't no younger, nor yet no richer than when yer honour left us—and what is't to be, sir?—a pint of stout, sir?'

As soon as Mr. Mollett senior had finished his dinner, and Tom had brought the father and son materials for making whisky-punch, they both got their knees together over the fire, and commenced the confidential conversation which Miss O'Dwyer had interrupted on her return to the bar-room. They spoke now almost in a whisper, with their heads together over the fender, knowing from experience that what Tom wanted in eyes he made up in ears.

'And what did Prendergast say when he paid you the rhino?' asked the son.

'Not a word,' said the other. 'After all, I don't think he knows any more than a ghost what he pays it for: I think he gets fresh instructions every time. But, any ways, there it was, all right.'

'Hall right, indeed! I do believe you'd be satisfied to go on getting a few dribblets now and then like that. And then if anything 'appened to you, why I might go fish.'

'How, Aby, look here—'

'It's hall very well, governor; but I'll tell you what. Since you started off I've been thinking a good deal about it, and I've made up my mind that this shilly-shallying won't do any

good: we must strike a blow that'll do something for us.'

'Well, I don't think we've done so bad already, taking it all-in-all.'

'Ah, that's because you haven't the pluck to strike a good blow. Now I'll just let you know what I propose—and I tell you fairly, governor, if you'll not hear reason, I'll take the game into my own hands.'

The father looked up from his drink and scowled at his son, but said nothing in answer to this threat.

'By G— I will!' continued Aby. 'It's no use 'umbugging, and I mean to make myself understood. While you've been gone I've been down to that place.'

'You 'aven't seen the old man?'

'No; I 'aven't taken that step yet; but I think it's very likely I may before long if you won't hear reason.'

'I was a d—— fool, Aby, ever to let you into the affair at all. It's been going on quiet enough for the last ten years, till I let you into the secret.'

'Well, never mind about that. That mischief's done. But I think you'll find I'll pull you through a deal better than hever you'd have pulled through yourself. You're already making twice more out of it that you did before I knew

it. As I was saying, I went down there; and in my quiet way I did just venture on a few hinquiries.'

'I'll be bound you did. You'll blow it all in about another month, and then it'll be up with the lot of us.'

'It's a beautiful place: a lovely spot; and hall in prime horder. They say it's fifteen thousand a year, and that there's not a shilling howing on the whole property. Even in these times the tenants are paying the rent, when no one else, far and near, is getting a penny out of them. I went by another place on the road—Castle Desmond they call it, and I wish you'd seen the difference. The old boy must be rolling in money.'

'I don't believe it. There's one as I can trust has told me he's hard up enough sometimes. Why, we've had twelve hundred in the last eight months.'

'Twelve hundred! and what's that? But, dickens, governor, where has the twelve hundred gone? I've only seen three of it, and part of that——. Well; what do you want there, you long-eared shark, you?' These last words were addressed to Tom, who had crept into the room, certainly without much preparatory noise.

'I was only wanting the thingumbob, yer honour,' said Tom, pretending to search diligently in the drawer for some required article.

'Then take your thingumbob quickly out of that, and be d—— to you. And look here; if you don't knock at the door when next you come in, by heavens I'll throw this tumbler at your yead.'

'Sure and I will, yer honour,' said Tom, withdrawing.

'And where on hearth has the twelve hundred pounds gone?' asked the son, looking severely at the father.

Old Mr. Mollett made no immediate answer in words, but putting his left hand to his right elbow, began to shake it.

'I do wonder that you keep hon at that work,' said Mollett junior, reproachfully. 'You never by any chance have a stroke of luck.'

'Well, I have been unfortunate lately; but who knows what's coming? And I was deucedly sold by those fellows at the October meeting. If any chap ever was safe, I ought to have been safe then; but hang me if I didn't drop four hundred of Sir Thomas's shiners coolly on the spot. That was the only big haul I've had out of him all at once; and the most of it went like water through a sieve within forty-eight hours after I touched it.' And then, having finished this pathetical little story of his misfortune, Mr. Mollett senior finished his glass of toddy.

'It's the way of the world, governor; and it's

no use sighing after spilt milk. But I'll tell you what I propose; and if you don't like the task yourself, I have no hobjection in life to take it into my own hands. You see the game's so much our own that there's nothing on hearth for us to fear.'

'I don't know that. If we were all blown, where should we be——'.

'Why, she's your own——'

'H-h-sh, Aby. There's that confounded long-eared fellow at the keyhole, as sure as my name's Matthew; and if he hears you, the game's all up with a vengeance.'

'Lord bless you, what could he hear? Besides, talking as we are now, he wouldn't catch a word even if he were in the room itself. And now I'll tell you what it is; do you go down yourself, and make your way into the hold gentleman's room. Just send your own name in boldly. Nobody will know what that means, except himself.'

'I did that once before; and I never shall forget it.'

'Yes, you did it once before, and you have had a steady income to live on ever since; not such an income as you might have had. Not such an income as will do for you and me, now that we both know so well what a fine property

we have under our thumbs. But, nevertheless, that little visit has been worth something to you.'

'Upon my word, Aby, I never suffered so much as I did that day. I didn't know till then that I had a soft heart.'

'Soft heart! Oh, bother. Such stuff as that always makes me sick. If I 'ate anything, it's maudlin. Your former visit down there did very well, and now you must make another, or else, by the holy poker! I'll make it for you.'

'And what would you have me say to him if I did manage to see him?'

'Perhaps I'd better go——'

'That's out of the question. He wouldn't see you, or understand who you were. And then you'd make a row, and it would all come out, and the fat would be in the fire.'

'Well, I guess I should not take it quite quiet if they didn't treat me as a gentleman should be treated. I ain't always over-quiet if I'm put upon.'

'If you go near that house at all I'll have done with it. I'll give up the game.'

'Well, do you go, at any rate first. Perhaps it may be well that I should follow after with a reminder. Do you go down, and just tell him this, quite coolly, remember——'

'Oh, I shall be cool enough.'

'That, considering hall things, you think he and you ought to——'

'Well?'

'Just divide it between you; share and share alike. Say it's fourteen thousand—and it's more than that—that would be seven for him and seven for you. Tell him you'll agree to that, but you won't take one farthing less.'

'Aby!' said the father, almost overcome by the grandeur of his son's ideas.

'Well; and what of Haby? What's the matter now?'

'Expect him to shell out seven thousand pounds a year!'

'And why not? He'll do a deal more than that, I expect, if he were quite sure that it would make all things serene. But it won't; and therefore you must make him another hoffer.'

'Another offer!'

'Yes. He'll know well enough that you'll be thinking of his death. And for all they do say he might pop off any day.'

'He's a younger man than me, Aby, by full ten years.'

'What of that? You may pop off any day too, mayn't you? I believe you old fellows don't think of dying nigh as hoften as we young ones.'

'You young ones are always looking for us old ones to go. We all know that well enough.'

'That's when you've got anything to leave behind you, which hain't the case with you, governor, just at present. But what I was saying is this. He'll know well enough that you can split upon his son hafter he's gone, every bit as well as you can split on him now.'

'Oh, I always looked to make the young gentleman pay up handsome, if so be the old gentleman went off the hooks. And if so be he and I should go off together like, why you'd carry on, of course. You'll have the proofs, you know.'

'Oh, I should, should I? Well, we'll look to them by-and-by. But I'll tell you what, governor, the best way is to make all that safe. We'll make him another hoffer—for a regular substantial family harrangement——'

'A family arrangement, eh?'

'Yes; that's the way they always manage things when great family hinterests is at stake. Let him give us a cool seven thousand a year between us while he's alive; let him put you down for twenty thousand when he's dead—that'd come out of the young gentleman's share of the property, of course—and then let him give me his daughter Hemmeline, with another twenty thousand tacked on to her skirt-tail. I

should be mum then for hever for the honour of the family.'

The father for a moment or two was struck dumb by the magnitude of his son's proposition. 'That's what I call playing the game firm,' continued the son. 'Do you lay down your terms before him, substantial, and then stick to 'em. "Them's my terms, Sir Thomas," you'll say. "If you don't like 'em, as I can't halter, why in course I'll go elsewhere." Do you be firm to that, and you'll see how the game'll go.'

'And you think he'll give you his daughter in marriage?'

'Why not? I'm honest born, hain't I? And she's a bastard.'

'But, Aby, you don't know what sort of people these are. You don't know what her breeding has been.'

'D—— her breeding. I know this: she'd get a deuced pretty fellow for her husband, and one that girls as good as her has hankered hafter long enough. It won't do, governor, to let people as is in their position pick and choose like. We've the hupper hand, and we must do the picking and choosing.'

'She'd never have you, Aby; not if her father went down on his knees to her to ask her.'

'Oh, wouldn't she? By heaven, then, she shall, and that without any kneeling at all. She

shall have me, and be deuced glad to take me. What! she'd refuse a fellow like me when she knows that she and all belonging to her'd be turned into the streets if she don't have me! I'm clear of another way of thinking, then. My opinion is she'd come to me jumping. I'll tell you what, governor, you don't know the sex.'

Mr. Mollett senior upon this merely shook his head. Perhaps the fact was that he knew the sex somewhat better than his son. It had been his fate during a portion of his life to live among people who were, or ought to have been, gentlemen. He might have been such himself had he not gone wrong in life from the very starting-post. But his son had had no such opportunities. He did know and could know nothing about ladies and gentlemen.

'You're mistaken, Aby,' said the old man. 'They'd never suffer you to come among them on such a footing as that. They'd sooner go forth to the world as beggars.'

'Then, by G——! they shall go forth as beggars. I've said it now, father, and I'll stick to it. You know the stuff I'm made of.' As he finished speaking, he swallowed down the last half of a third glass of hot spirits and water, and then glared on his father with angry, blood-shot eyes, and a red, almost lurid face. The

unfortunate father was beginning to know the son, and to feel that his son would become his master.

Shortly after this they were interrupted; and what further conversation they had on the matter that night took place in their joint bedroom; to which uninviting retreat it is not now necessary that we should follow them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAMINE YEAR.

THEY who were in the south of Ireland during the winter of 1846-47 will not readily forget the agony of that period. For many, many years preceding and up to that time, the increasing swarms of the country had been fed upon the potato, and upon the potato only; and now all at once the potato failed them, and the greater part of eight million human beings were left without food.

The destruction of the potato was the work of God; and it was natural to attribute the sufferings which at once overwhelmed the unfortunate country to God's anger—to his wrath for the misdeeds of which that country had been guilty. For myself, I do not believe in such exhibitions of God's anger. When wars come, and pestilence, and famine; when the people of a land are worse than decimated, and the living hardly able to bury the dead, I cannot coincide with those who would deprecate God's wrath by prayers. I do

not believe that our God stalks darkly along the clouds, laying thousands low with the arrows of death, and those thousands the most ignorant, because men who are not ignorant have displeased Him. Nor, if in his wisdom He did do so, can I think that men's prayers would hinder that which his wisdom had seen to be good and right.

But though I do not believe in exhibitions of God's anger, I do believe in exhibitions of his mercy. When men by their folly and by the shortness of their vision have brought upon themselves penalties which seem to be overwhelming, to which no end can be seen, which would be overwhelming were no aid coming to us but our own, then God raises his hand, not in anger, but in mercy, and by his wisdom does for us that for which our own wisdom has been insufficient.

But on no Christian basis can I understand the justice or acknowledge the propriety of asking our Lord to abate his wrath in detail, or to alter his settled purpose. If He be wise, would we change his wisdom? If He be merciful, would we limit his mercy? There comes upon us some strange disease, and we bid Him to stay his hand. But the disease, when it has passed by, has taught us lessons of cleanliness, which no master less stern would have made acceptable. A famine strikes us, and we again beg that that hand may be stayed;—beg as the Greeks were said to beg

when they thought that the anger of Phœbus was hot against them because his priest had been dishonoured. We so beg, thinking that God's anger is hot also against us. But, lo! the famine passes by, and a land that had been brought to the dust by man's folly is once more prosperous and happy.

If this was ever so in the world's history, it was so in Ireland at the time of which I am speaking. The country, especially in the south and west, had been brought to a terrible pass; —not as so many said and do say, by the idolatry of popery, or by the sedition of demagogues, or even mainly by the idleness of the people. The idolatry of popery, to my way of thinking, is bad; though not so bad in Ireland as in most other Papist countries that I have visited. Sedition also is bad; but in Ireland, in late years, it has not been deep-seated—as may have been noted at Ballingarry and other places, where endeavour was made to bring sedition to its proof. And as for the idleness of Ireland's people, I am inclined to think they will work under the same compulsion and same persuasion which produce work in other countries.

The fault had been the lowness of education and consequent want of principle among the middle classes; and this fault had been found as strongly marked among the Protestants as it had

been among the Roman Catholics. Young men were brought up to do nothing. Property was regarded as having no duties attached to it. Men became rapacious, and determined to extract the uttermost farthing out of the land within their power, let the consequences to the people on that land be what they might.

We used to hear much of absentees. It was not the absence of the absentees that did the damage, but the presence of those they left behind them on the soil. The scourge of Ireland was the existence of a class who looked to be gentlemen living on their property, but who should have earned their bread by the work of their brain, or, failing that, by the sweat of their brow. There were men to be found in shoals through the country speaking of their properties and boasting of their places, but who owned no properties and had no places when the matter came to be properly sifted.

Most Englishmen have heard of profit-rent. In Ireland the term is so common that no man cannot have heard of it. It may, of course, designate a very becoming sort of income. A man may, for instance, take a plot of land for one hundred pounds a year, improve and build on it till it be fairly worth one thousand pounds a year, and thus enjoy a profit-rent of nine hundred pounds. Nothing can be better or fairer. But in Ireland

the management was very different. Men there held tracts of ground, very often at their full value, paying for them such proportion of rent as a farmer could afford to pay in England and live. But the Irish tenant would by no means consent to be a farmer. It was needful to him that he should be a gentleman, and that his sons should be taught to live and amuse themselves as the sons of gentlemen—barring any such small trifle as education. They did live in this way; and to enable them to do so, they underlet their land in small patches, and at an amount of rent to collect which took the whole labour of their tenants, and the whole produce of the small patch, over and above the quantity of potatoes absolutely necessary to keep that tenant's body and soul together.

And thus a state of things was engendered in Ireland which discouraged labour, which discouraged improvements in farming, which discouraged any produce from the land except the potato crop; which maintained one class of men in what they considered to be the gentility of idleness, and another class, the people of the country, in the abjectness of poverty.

It is with thorough rejoicing, almost with triumph, that I declare that the idle, genteel class has been cut up root and branch, has been driven forth out of its holding into the wide world, and has been punished with the penalty of extermina-

tion. The poor cotter suffered sorely under the famine, and under the pestilence which followed the famine; but he, as a class, has risen from his bed of suffering a better man. He is thriving as a labourer either in his own country or in some newer—for him better—land to which he has emigrated. He, even in Ireland, can now get eight and nine shillings a week easier and with more constancy than he could get four some fifteen years since. But the other man has gone, and his place is left happily vacant.

There are an infinite number of smaller bearings in which this question of the famine, and of agricultural distress in Ireland, may be regarded, and should be regarded by those who wish to understand it. The manner in which the Poor Law was first rejected and then accepted, and then, if one may say so, swallowed whole by the people; the way in which emigration has affected them; the difference in the system of labour there from that here, which in former days was so strong that an agricultural labourer living on his wages and buying food with them, was a person hardly to be found: all these things must be regarded by one who would understand the matter. But seeing that this book of mine is a novel, I have perhaps already written more on a dry subject than many will read.

Such having been the state of the country, such

its wretchedness, a merciful God sent the remedy which might avail to arrest it; and we—we deprecated his wrath. But all this will soon be known and acknowledged; acknowledged as it is acknowledged that new cities rise up in splendour from the ashes into which old cities have been consumed by fire. If this beneficent agency did not from time to time disencumber our crowded places, we should ever be living in narrow alleys with stinking gutters, and supply of water at the minimum.

But very frightful are the flames as they rush through the chambers of the poor, and very frightful was the course of that violent remedy which brought Ireland out of its misfortunes. Those who saw its course, and watched its victims, will not readily forget what they saw.

Slowly, gradually, and with a voice that was for a long time discredited, the news spread itself through the country that the food of the people was gone. That his own crop was rotten and useless each cotter quickly knew, and realized the idea that he must work for wages if he could get them, or else go to the poorhouse. That the crop of his parish or district was gone became evident to the priest, and the parson, and the squire; and they realized the idea that they must fall on other parishes or other districts for support. But it was long before the fact made

itself known that there was no food in any parish, in any district.

When this was understood, men certainly did put their shoulders to the wheel with a great effort. Much abuse at the time was thrown upon the government; and they who took upon themselves the management of the relief of the poor in the south-west were taken most severely to task. I was in the country, travelling always through it, during the whole period, and I have to say—as I did say at the time with a voice that was not very audible—that in my opinion the measures of the government were prompt, wise, and beneficent; and I have to say also that the efforts of those who managed the poor were, as a rule, unremitting, honest, impartial, and successful.

The feeding of four million starving people with food, to be brought from foreign lands, is not an easy job. No government could bring the food itself; but by striving to do so it might effectually prevent such bringing on the part of others. Nor when the food was there, on the quays, was it easy to put it, in due proportions, into the four million mouths. Some mouths, and they, alas! the weaker ones, would remain unfed. But the opportunity was a good one for slashing philanthropical censure; and then the business of the slashing, censorious philanthropist is so easy, so exciting, and so pleasant!

I think that no portion of Ireland suffered more severely during the famine than the counties Cork and Kerry. The poorest parts were perhaps the parishes lying back from the sea and near to the mountains; and in the midst of such a district Desmond Court was situated. The region immediately round Castle Richmond was perhaps better. The tenants there had more means at their disposal, and did not depend so absolutely on the potato crop; but even round Castle Richmond the distress was very severe.

Early in the year relief committees were formed, on one of which young Herbert Fitzgerald agreed to act. His father promised, and was prepared to give his best assistance, both by money and countenance; but he pleaded that the state of his health hindered him from active exertion, and therefore his son came forward in his stead on this occasion, as it appeared probable that he would do on all others having reference to the family property.

This work brought people together who would hardly have met but for such necessity. The priest and the parson of a parish, men who had hitherto never been in a room together, and between whom neither had known anything of the other but the errors of his doctrine, found themselves fighting for the same object at the same board, and each for the moment laid

aside his religious ferocity. Gentlemen, whose ancestors had come over with Strongbow, or maybe even with Milesius, sat cheek by jowl with retired haberdashers, concerting new soup kitchens, and learning on what smallest modicum of pudding made from Indian corn a family of seven might be kept alive, and in such condition that the father at least might be able to stand upright.

The town of Kanturk was the head-quarters of that circle to which Herbert Fitzgerald was attached, in which also would have been included the owner of Desmond Court, had there been an owner of an age to undertake such work. But the young earl was still under sixteen, and the property was represented, as far as any representation was made, by the countess.

But even in such a work as this, a work which so strongly brought out what there was of good among the upper classes, there was food for jealousy and ill will. The name of Owen Fitzgerald at this time did not stand high in the locality of which we are speaking. Men had presumed to talk both to him and of him, and he replied to their censures by scorn. He would not change his mode of living for them, or allow them to believe that their interference could in any way operate upon his conduct. He had therefore affected a worse character for morals than

he had perhaps truly deserved, and had thus thrown off from him all intimacy with many of the families among whom he lived.

When, therefore, he had come forward as others had done, offering to join his brother-magistrates and the clergyman of the district in their efforts, they had, or he had thought that they had, looked coldly on him. His property was half way between Kanturk and Mallow; and when this occurred he turned his shoulder upon the former place, and professed to act with those whose meetings were held at the latter town. Thus he became altogether divided from that Castle Richmond neighbourhood to which he was naturally attached by old intimacies and family ties.

It was a hard time this for the poor countess. I have endeavoured to explain that the position in which she had been left with regard to money was not at any time a very easy one. She possessed high rank and the name of a countess, but very little of that wealth which usually constitutes the chief advantage of such rank and name. But now such means as had been at her disposal were terribly crippled. There was no poorer district than that immediately around her, and none, therefore, in which the poor rates rose to a more fearful proportion of the rent. The country was, and for that matter still is, divided,

for purposes of poor-law rating, into electoral districts. In ordinary times a man, or at any rate a lady, may live and die in his or her own house without much noticing the limits or peculiarities of each district. In one the rate may be one and a penny in the pound, in another only a shilling. But the difference is not large enough to create inquiry. It is divided between the landlord and the tenant, and neither perhaps thinks much about it. But when the demand made rises to seventeen or eighteen shillings in the pound—as was the case in some districts in those days,—when out of every pound of rent that he paid the tenant claimed to deduct nine shillings for poor rates, that is, half the amount levied—then a landlord becomes anxious enough as to the peculiarities of his own electoral division.

In the case of Protestant clergymen, the whole rate had to be paid by the incumbent. A gentleman whose half-yearly rent-charge amounted to perhaps two hundred pounds might have nine tenths of that sum deducted from him for poor rates. I have known a case in which the proportion has been higher than this.

And then the tenants in such districts began to decline to pay any rent at all—in very many cases could pay no rent at all. They, too, depended on the potatoes which were gone;

they, too, had been subject to those dreadful demands for poor rates; and thus a landlord whose property was in any way embarrassed had but a bad time of it. The property from which Lady Desmond drew her income had been very much embarrassed; and for her the times were very bad.

In such periods of misfortune, a woman has always some friend. Let her be who she may, some pair of broad shoulders is forthcoming on which may be laid so much of the burden as is by herself unbearable. It is the great privilege of womanhood, that which compensates them for the want of those other privileges which belong exclusively to manhood—sitting in Parliament, for instance, preaching sermons, and going on 'Change.

At this time Lady Desmond would doubtless have chosen the shoulders of Owen Fitzgerald for the bearing of her burden, had he not turned against her, as he had done. But now there was no hope of that. Those broad shoulders had burdens of their own to bear of another sort, and it was at any rate impossible that he should come to share those of Desmond Court.

But a champion was forthcoming; one, indeed, whose shoulders were less broad; on looking at whose head and brow Lady Desmond could not forget her years as she had done while Owen

Fitzgerald had been near her;—but a champion, nevertheless, whom she greatly prized. This was Owen's cousin, Herbert Fitzgerald.

'Mamma,' her daughter said to her one evening, as they were sitting together in the only room which they now inhabited. 'Herbert wants us to go to that place near Kilcommon to-morrow, and says he will send the car at two. I suppose I can go?'

There were two things that Lady Desmond noticed in this: first, that her daughter should have called young Mr. Fitzgerald by his Christian name; and secondly, that it should have come to that with them, that a Fitzgerald should send a vehicle for a Desmond, seeing that the Desmond could no longer provide a vehicle for herself.

'You could have had the pony-chair, my dear.'

'Oh, no, mamma; I would not do that.' The pony was now the only quadruped kept for the countess's own behoof; and the young earl's hunter was the only other horse in the Desmond Court stables. 'I wouldn't do that, mamma; Mary and Emmeline will not mind coming round.'

'But they will have to come round again to bring you back.'

'Yes, mamma. Herbert said they wouldn't mind it. We want to see how they are managing at the new soup kitchen they have there.

That one at Clady is very bad. The boiler won't boil at all.'

'Very well, my dear; only mind you wrap yourself up.'

'Oh, yes; I always do.'

'But, Clara—' and Lady Desmond put on her sweetest, smoothest smile as she spoke to her daughter.

'Yes, mamma.'

'How long have you taken to call young Mr. Fitzgerald by his Christian name?'

'Oh, I never do, mamma,' said Clara, with a blush all over her face; 'not to himself, I mean. You see, Mary and Emmeline are always talking about him.'

'And therefore you mean always to talk about him also.'

'No, mamma. But one can't help talking about him; he is doing so much for these poor people. I don't think he ever thinks about anything else from morning to night. Emmeline says he always goes to it again after dinner. Don't you think he is very good about it, mamma?'

'Yes, my dear; very good indeed; almost good enough to be called Herbert.'

'But I don't call him so; you know I don't,' protested Clara, very energetically.

'He is very good,' continued the countess; 'very good indeed. I don't know what on earth

we should do without him. If he were my own son, he could hardly be more attentive to me.'

'Then I may go with the girls to that place? I always forget the name.'

'Gortnaclough, you mean.'

'Yes, mamma. It is all Sir Thomas's property there; and they have got a regular kitchen, beautifully built, Her— Mr. Fitzgerald says, with a regular cook. I do wish we could have one at Clady.'

'Mr. Fitzgerald will be here to-morrow morning, and I will talk to him about it. I fear we have not sufficient funds there.'

'No; that's just it. I do wish I had some money now. You won't mind if I am not home quite early? We all mean to dine there at the kitchen. The girls will bring something, and then we can stay out the whole afternoon.'

'It won't do for you to be out after nightfall, Clara.'

'No, I won't, mamma. They did want me to go home with them to Castle Richmond for to-morrow night; but I declined that,' and Clara uttered a slight sigh, as though she had declined something that would have been very pleasant to her.

'And why did you decline it?'

'Oh, I don't know. I didn't know whether you would like it; and besides—'

'Besides what?'

'You'd be here all alone, mamma.'

The countess got up from her chair and coming over to the place where her daughter was sitting, kissed her on her forehead. 'In such a matter as that, I don't want you to think of me, my dear. I would rather you went out. I must remain here in this horrid, dull, wretched place; but that is no reason why you should be buried alive. I would much rather that you went out sometimes.'

'No, mamma; I will remain with you.'

'It will be quite right that you should go to Castle Richmond to-morrow. If they send their carriage round here for you——'

'It'll only be the car.'

'Well, the car; and if the girls come all that way out of their road in the morning to pick you up, it will be only civil that you should go back by Castle Richmond, and you would enjoy an evening there with the girls very much.'

'But I said decidedly that I would not go.'

'Tell them to-morrow as decidedly that you have changed your mind, and will be delighted to accept their invitation. They will understand that it is because you have spoken to me.'

'But, mamma——'

'You will like going; will you not?'

'Yes; I shall like it.'

And so that matter was settled. On the whole, Lady Desmond was inclined to admit within her own heart that her daughter had behaved very well in that matter of the banishment of Owen Fitzgerald. She knew that Clara had never seen him, and had refused to open his letters. Very little had been said upon the subject between the mother and daughter. Once or twice Owen's name had been mentioned; and once, when it had been mentioned, with heavy blame on account of his alleged sins, Clara had ventured to take his part.

'People delight to say ill-natured things,' she had said; 'but one is not obliged to believe them all.'

From that time Lady Desmond had never mentioned his name, rightly judging that Clara would be more likely to condemn him in her own heart if she did not hear him condemned by others: and so the mother and daughter had gone on, as though the former had lost no friend, and the latter had lost no lover.

For some time after the love adventure, Clara had been pale and drooping, and the countess had been frightened about her; but latterly she had got over this. The misfortune which had fallen so heavily upon them all seemed to have done her good. She had devoted herself from the first to do her little quota of work towards lessening

the suffering around her, and the effort had been salutary to her.

Whether or no in her heart of hearts she did still think of Owen Fitzgerald, her mother was unable to surmise. From the fire which had flashed from her eyes on that day when she accused the world of saying ill-natured things of him, Lady Desmond had been sure that such was the case. But she had never ventured to probe her child's heart. She had given very little confidence to Clara, and could not, therefore, and did not expect confidence in return.

Nor was Clara a girl likely in such a matter to bestow confidence on any one. She was one who could hold her heart full, and yet not speak of her heart's fulness. Her mother had called her a child, and in some respects she then was so; but this childishness had been caused, not by lack of mental power, but want of that conversation with others which is customary to girls of her age. This want had in some respects made her childish; for it hindered her from expressing herself in firm tones, and caused her to blush and hesitate when she spoke. But in some respects it had the opposite effect, and made her older than her age, for she was thoughtful, silent, and patient of endurance.

Latterly, since this dreary famine-time had come upon them, an intimacy had sprung up

between Clara and the Castle Richmond girls, and in a measure, too, between Clara and Herbert Fitzgerald. Lady Desmond had seen this with great pleasure. Though she had objected to Owen Fitzgerald for her daughter, she had no objection to the Fitzgerald name. Herbert was his father's only son, and heir to the finest property in the county—at any rate, to the property which at present was the best circumstanced. Owen Fitzgerald could never be more than a little squire, but Herbert would be a baronet. Owen's utmost ambition would be to live at Hap House all his life, and die the oracle of the Duhallow hunt; but Herbert would be a member of Parliament, with a house in London. A daughter of the house of Desmond might marry the heir of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, and be thought to have done well; whereas, she would disgrace herself by becoming the mistress of Hap House. Lady Desmond, therefore, had been delighted to see this intimacy.

It had been in no spirit of fault-finding that she had remarked to her daughter as to her use of that Christian name. What would be better than that they should be to each other as Herbert and Clara? But the cautious mother had known how easy it would be to frighten her timid fawn-like child. It was no time, no time as yet, to question her heart about this second lover—if

lover he might be. The countess was much too subtle in her way to frighten her child's heart back to its old passion. That passion doubtless would die from want of food. Let it be starved and die; and then this other new passion might spring up.

The Countess of Desmond had no idea that her daughter, with severe self-questioning, had taken her own heart to task about this former lover; had argued with herself that the man who could so sin, could live such a life, and so live in these fearful times, was unworthy of her love, and must be torn out of her heart, let the cost be what it might. Of such high resolves on her daughter's part, nay, on the part of any young girl, Lady Desmond had no knowledge.

Clara Desmond had determined, slowly determined, to give up the man whom she had owned to love. She had determined that duty and female dignity required her to do so. And in this manner it had been done; not by the child-like forgetfulness which her mother attributed to her.

And so it was arranged that she should stay the following night at Castle Richmond.

CHAPTER VIII.

GORTNACLOUGH AND BERRYHILL.

And now at last we will get to Castle Richmond, at which place, seeing that it gives the title to our novel, we ought to have arrived long since.

As had been before arranged, the two Miss Fitzgeralds did call at Desmond Court early on the following day, and were delighted at being informed by Lady Desmond that Clara had changed her mind, and would, if they would now allow her, stay the night at Castle Richmond.

'The truth was, she did not like to leave me,' said the countess, whispering prettily into the ear of the eldest of the two girls; 'but I am delighted that she should have an opportunity of getting out of this dull place for a few hours. It was so good of you to think of her.'

Miss Fitzgerald made some civil answer, and away they all went. Herbert was on horseback, and remained some minutes after them to discuss

her own difficulties with the countess, and to say a few words about that Clady boiler that would not boil. Clara on this subject had opened her heart to him, and he had resolved that the boiler should be made to boil. So he said that he would go over and look at it, resolving also to send that which would be much more efficacious than himself, namely, the necessary means and workmen for bringing about so desirable a result. And then he rode after the girls, and caught the car just as it reached Gortnaclough.

How they all spent their day at the soup kitchen, which however, though so called, partook quite as much of the character of a bake-house; how they studied the art of making yellow Indian meal into puddings; how the girls wanted to add milk and sugar, not understanding at first the deep principles of political economy, which soon taught them not to waste on the comforts of a few that which was so necessary for the life of many; how the poor women brought in their sick ailing children, accepting the proffered food, but bitterly complaining of it as they took it,—complaining of it because they wanted money, with which they still thought that they could buy potatoes—all this need not here or now be described. Our present business is to get them all back to Castle Richmond.

There had been some talk of their dining at

Gortnaclough, because it was known that the ladies at Desmond Court dined early; but now that Clara was to return to Castle Richmond, that idea was given up, and they all got back to the house in time for the family dinner.

'Mamma,' said Emmeline, walking first into the drawing-room, 'Lady Clara has come back with us after all, and is going to stay here to-night; we are so glad.'

Lady Fitzgerald got up from her sofa, and welcomed her young guest with a kiss.

'It is very good of you to come,' she said; 'very good indeed. You won't find it dull, I hope, because I know you are thinking about the same thing as these children.'

Lady Clara muttered some sort of indistinct little protest as to the impossibility of being dull with her present friends.

'Oh, she's as full of corn meal and pints of soup as any one,' said Emmeline; 'and knows exactly how much turf it takes to boil fifteen stone of pudding; don't you, Clara? But come up stairs, for we haven't long, and I know you are frozen. You must dress with us, dear; for there will be no fire in your own room, as we didn't expect you.'

'I wish we could get them to like it,' said Clara, standing with one foot on the fender, in the middle of the process of dressing, so as to warm

her toes; and her friend Emmeline was standing by her, with her arm round her waist.

'I don't think we shall ever do that,' said Mary, who was sitting at the glass brushing her hair; 'it's so cold, and heavy, and uncomfortable when they get it.'

'You see,' said Emmeline, 'though they did only have potatoes before, they always had them quite warm; and though a dinner of potatoes seems very poor, they did have it altogether, in their own houses, you know; and I think the very cooking it was some comfort to them.'

'And I suppose they couldn't be taught to cook this themselves, so as to make it comfortable in their own cabins?' said Clara, despondingly.

'Herbert says it's impossible,' said Mary.

'And I'm sure he knows,' said Clara.

'They would waste more than they would eat,' said Emmeline. 'Besides, it is so hard to cook it as it should be cooked; sometimes it seems impossible to make it soft.'

'So it does,' said Clara, sadly; 'but if we could only have it hot for them when they come for it, wouldn't that be better?'

'The great thing is to have it for them at all,' said Mary the wise (for she had been studying the matter more deeply than her friend); 'there are so many who as yet get none.'

'Herbert says that the millers will grind up the

husks and all at the mills, so as to make the most of it; that's what makes it so hard to cook,' said Emmeline.

'How very wrong of them!' protested Clara; 'but isn't Herbert going to have a mill put up of his own?'

And so they went on, till I fear they kept the Castle Richmond dinner waiting for full fifteen minutes.

Castle Richmond, too, would have been a dull house, as Lady Fitzgerald had intimated, had it not been that there was a common subject of such vital interest to the whole party. On that subject they were all intent, and on that subject they talked the whole evening, planning, preparing, and laying out schemes; devising how their money might be made to go furthest; discussing deep questions of political economy, and making no doubt many errors in their discussions.

Lady Fitzgerald took a part in all this, and so occasionally did Sir Thomas. Indeed, on this evening he was more active than was usual with him. He got up from his arm-chair, and came to the table, in order that he might pore over the map of the estate with them; for they were dividing the property into districts, and seeing how best the poor might be visited in their own localities.

And then, as he did so, he became liberal.

Liberal, indeed, he always was; but now he made offers of assistance more than his son had dared to ask; and they were all busy, contented, and in a great degree joyous—joyous, though their work arose from the contiguity of such infinite misery. But what can ever be more joyous than efforts made for lessening misery?

During all this time Miss Letty was fast asleep in her own arm-chair. But let no one on that account accuse her of a hard heart; for she had nearly walked her old legs off that day in going about from cabin to cabin round the demesne.

'But we must consult Somers about that mill,' said Sir Thomas.

'Oh, of course,' said Herbert; 'I know how to talk Somers over.'

This was added *sotto voce* to his mother and the girls. Now Mr. Somers was the agent on the estate.

This mill was to be at Berryhill, a spot also on Sir Thomas's property, but in a different direction from Gortnaclough. There was there what the Americans would call a water privilege, a stream to which some fall of land just there gave power enough to turn a mill; and was now a question how they might utilize that power.

During the day just past Clara had been with them, but they were now talking of what they would do when she would have left them. This

created some little feeling of awkwardness, for Clara had put her whole heart into the work at Gortnaclough, and it was evident that she would have been so delighted to continue with them.

'But why on earth need you go home to-morrow, Lady Clara?' said Herbert.

'Oh, I must; mamma expects me, you know.'

'Of course we should send word. Indeed, I must send to Clady to-morrow, and the man must pass by Desmond Court gate.'

'Oh, yes, Clara; and you can write a line. It would be such a pity that you should not see all about the mill, now that we have talked it over together. Do tell her to stay, mamma.'

'I am sure I wish she would,' said Lady Fitzgerald. 'Could not Lady Desmond manage to spare you for one day?'

'She is all alone, you know,' said Clara, whose heart, however, was bent on accepting the invitation.

'Perhaps she would come over and join us,' said Lady Fitzgerald, feeling, however, that the subject was not without danger. Sending a carriage for a young girl like Lady Clara did very well, but it might not answer if she were to offer to send for the Countess of Desmond.

'Oh, mamma never goes out.'

'I'm quite sure she'd like you to stay,' said Herbert. 'After you were all gone yesterday,

she said how delighted she was to have you go away for a little time. And she did say she thought you could not go to a better place than Castle Richmond.'

'I am sure that was very kind of her,' said Lady Fitzgerald.

'Did she?' said Clara, longingly.

And so after a while it was settled that she should send a line to her mother, saying that she had been persuaded to stay over one other night, and that she should accompany them to inspect the site of this embryo mill at Berryhill.

'And I will write a line to the countess,' said Lady Fitzgerald, 'telling her how impossible it was for you to hold your own intention when we were all attacking you on the other side.'

And so the matter was settled.

On the following day they were to leave home almost immediately after breakfast; and on this occasion Miss Letty insisted on going with them.

'There's a seat on the car, I know, Herbert,' she said; 'for you mean to ride; and I'm just as much interested about the mill as any of you.'

'I'm afraid the day would be too long for you, Aunt Letty,' said Mary: 'we shall stay there, you know, till after four.'

'Not a bit too long. When I'm tired I shall go into Mrs. Townsend's; the glebe is not ten minutes' drive from Berryhill.'

The Rev. Æneas Townsend was the rector of the parish, and he, as well as his wife, were fast friends of Aunt Letty. As we get on in the story we shall, I trust, become acquainted with the Rev. Æneas Townsend and his wife. It was ultimately found that there was no getting rid of Aunt Letty, and so the party was made up.

They were all standing about the hall after breakfast, looking up their shawls and cloaks and coats, and Herbert was in the act of taking special and very suspicious care of Lady Clara's throat, when there came a ring at the door. The visitor, whoever he might be, was not kept long waiting, for one servant was in the hall, and another just outside the front door with the car, and a third holding Herbert's horse.

'I wish to see Sir Thomas,' said a man's voice as soon as the door was opened; and the man entered the hall, and then seeing that it was full of ladies, retreated again into the doorway. He was an elderly man, dressed almost more than well, for there was about him a slight affectation of dandyism; and though he had for the moment been abashed, there was about him also a slight swagger. 'Good morning, ladies,' he said, re-entering again, and bowing to young Herbert, who stood looking at him; 'I believe Sir Thomas is at home; would you send your servant in to say that a gentleman wants to see him for a

minute or so, on very particular business? I am a little in a hurry like.'

The door of the drawing-room was ajar, so that Lady Fitzgerald, who was sitting there tranquilly in her own seat, could hear the voice. And she did hear it, and knew that some stranger had come to trouble her husband. But she did not come forth; why should she? was not Herbert there—if, indeed, even Herbert could be of any service?

'Shall I take your card into Sir Thomas, sir?' said one of the servants coming forward.

'Card!' said Mollett senior out loud; 'well, if it is necessary, I believe I have a card.' And he took from his pocket a greasy pocket-book, and extracted from it a piece of pasteboard on which his name was written. 'There; give that to Sir Thomas. I don't think there's much doubt but that he'll see me.' And then, uninvited, he sat himself down in one of the hall chairs.

Sir Thomas's study, the room in which he himself sat, and in which indeed he might almost be said to live at present,—for on many days he only came out to dine, and then again to go to bed,—was at some little distance to the back of the house, and was approached by a passage from the hall. While the servant was gone, the ladies finished their wrapping, and got up on the car.

'Oh, Mr. Fitzgerald,' said Clara, laughing, 'I shan't be able to breathe with all that on me.'

'Look at Mary and Emmeline,' said he; 'they have got twice as much. You don't know how cold it is.'

'You had better have the fur close to your body,' said Aunt Letty; 'look here;' and she showed that her gloves were lined with fur, and her boots, and that she had gotten some nondescript furry article of attire stuck in underneath the body of her dress.

'But you must let me have them a little looser, Mr. Fitzgerald,' said Clara; 'there, that will do,' and then they all got upon the car and started. Herbert was perhaps two minutes after them before he mounted; but when he left the hall the man was still sitting there; for the servant had not yet come back from his father's room.

But the clatter of his horse's hoofs was still distinct enough at the hall door when the servant did come back, and in a serious tone desired the stranger to follow him. 'Sir Thomas will see you,' said the servant, putting some stress on the word will.

'Oh, I did not doubt that the least in the world,' said Mr. Mollett, as he followed the man along the passage.

The morning was very cold. There had been rainy weather, but it now appeared to be a settled frost. The roads were rough and hard, and the man who was driving them said a word now and again to his young master as to the expediency of getting frost nails put into the horse's shoes. 'I'd better go gently, Mr. Herbert; it may be he might come down at some of these pitches.' So they did go gently, and at last arrived safely at Berryhill.

And very busy they were there all day. The inspection of the site for the mill was not their only employment. Here also was an establishment for distributing food, and a crowd of poor half-fed wretches were there to meet them. Not that at that time things were so bad as they became afterwards. Men were not dying on the road-side, nor as yet had the apathy of want produced its terrible cure for the agony of hunger. The time had not yet come when the famished living skeletons might be seen to reject the food which could no longer serve to prolong their lives.

Though this had not come as yet, the complaints of the women with their throngs of children were bitter enough; and it was heart-breaking too to hear the men declare that they had worked like horses, and that it was hard upon them now to see their children starve like dogs.

For in this earlier part of the famine the people did not seem to realize the fact that this scarcity and want had come from God. Though they saw the potatoes rotting in their own gardens, under their own eyes, they still seemed to think that the rich men of the land could stay the famine if they would; that the fault was with them; that the famine could be put down if the rich would but stir themselves to do it. Before it was over they were well aware that no human power could suffice to put it down. Nay, more than that; they had almost begun to doubt the power of God to bring back better days.

They strove, and toiled, and planned, and hoped at Berryhill that day. And infinite was the good that was done by such efforts as these. That they could not hinder God's work we all know; but much they did do to lessen the sufferings around, and many were the lives that were thus saved.

They were all standing behind the counter of a small store that had been hired in the village—the three girls at least, for Aunt Letty had already gone to the glebe, and Herbert was still down at the 'water privilege,' talking to a millwright and a carpenter. This was a place at which Indian corn flour, that which after a while was generally termed 'meal' in those famine days, was sold to the poor. At

this period much of it was absolutely given away. This plan, however, was soon found to be injurious; for hundreds would get it who were not absolutely in want, and would then sell it;—for the famine by no means improved the morals of the people.

And therefore it was found better to sell the flour; to sell it at a cheap rate, considerably less sometimes than the cost price; and to put the means of buying it into the hands of the people by giving them work, and paying them wages. Towards the end of these times, when the full weight of the blow was understood, and the subject had been in some sort studied, the general rule was thus to sell the meal at its true price, hindering the exorbitant profit of hucksters by the use of large stores, and to require that all those who could not buy it should seek the means of living within the walls of workhouses. The regular established workhouses, —unions as they were called,—were not as yet numerous, but supernumerary houses were provided in every town, and were crowded from the cellars to the roofs.

It need hardly be explained that no general rule could be established and acted upon at once. The numbers to be dealt with were so great, that the exceptions to all rules were overwhelming. But such and such like were

the efforts made, and these efforts ultimately were successful.

The three girls were standing behind the counter of a little store which Sir Thomas had hired at Berryhill, when a woman came into the place with two children in her arms and followed by four others of different ages. She was a gaunt tall creature, with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, and her clothes hung about her in unintelligible rags. There was a crowd before the counter, for those who had been answered or served stood staring at the three ladies, and could hardly be got to go away; but this woman pressed her way through, pushing some and using harsh language to others, till she stood immediately opposite to Clara.

'Look at that, madam,' she cried, undoing an old handkerchief which she held in her hand, and displaying the contents on the counter; 'is that what the likes of you calls food for poor people? is that fit 'ating to give to children? Would any av ye put such stuff as that into the stomachs of your own bairns?' and she pointed to the mess which lay revealed upon the handkerchief.

The food, as food, was not nice to look at; and could not have been nice to eat, or probably easy of digestion when eaten.

'Feel of that.' And the woman rubbed her

forefinger among it to show that it was rough and hard, and that the particles were as sharp as though sand had been mixed with it. The stuff was half-boiled Indian meal, which had been improperly subjected at first to the full heat of boiling water; and in its present state was bad food either for children or grown people. 'Feel of that,' said the woman; 'would you like to be 'ating that yourself now?'

'I don't think you have cooked it quite enough,' said Clara, looking into the woman's face, half with fear and half with pity, and putting, as she spoke, her pretty delicate finger down into the nasty daubed mess of parboiled yellow flour.

'Cooked it!' said the woman scornfully. 'All the cooking on 'arth wouldn't make food of that fit for a Christian—feel of the roughness of it'—and she turned to another woman who stood near her; 'would you like to be putting sharp points like that into your children's bellies?'

It was quite true that the grains of it were hard and sharp, so as to give one an idea that it would make good eating neither for women nor children. The millers and dealers, who of course made their profits in these times, did frequently grind up the whole corn without separating the grain from the husks, and the shell of a grain of Indian corn does not, when ground, become soft

flour. This woman had reason for her complaints, as had many thousands reason for similar complaints.

'Don't be troubling the ladies, Kitty,' said an old man standing by; 'sure and weren't you glad enough to be getting it.'

'She'd be axing the ladies to go home wid her and cook it for her after giving it her,' said another.

'Who says it war guv' me?' said the angry mother. 'Didn't I buy it, here at this counter, with Mike's own hard-'arned money? and it's chaiting us they are. Give me back my money.' And she looked at Clara as though she meant to attack her across the counter.

'Mr. Fitzgerald is going to put up a mill of his own, and then the corn will be better ground,' said Emmeline Fitzgerald, deprecating the woman's wrath.

'Put up a mill!' said the woman, still in scorn. 'Are you going to give me back my money; or food that my poor bairns can ate?'

This individual little difficulty was ended by a donation to the angry woman of another lot of meal, in taking away which she was careful not to leave behind her the mess which she had brought in her handkerchief. But she expressed no thanks on being so treated.

The hardest burden which had to be borne by those who exerted themselves at this period was the ingratitude of the poor for whom they worked; —or rather I should say thanklessness. To call them ungrateful would imply too deep a reproach, for their convictions were that they were being ill used by the upper classes. When they received bad meal which they could not cook, and even in their extreme hunger could hardly eat half-cooked; when they were desired to leave their cabins and gardens, and flock into the wretched barracks which were prepared for them; when they saw their children wasting away under a suddenly altered system of diet, it would have been unreasonable to expect that they should have been grateful. Grateful for what? Had they not at any rate a right to claim life, to demand food that should keep them and their young ones alive? But not the less was it a hard task for delicate women to work hard, and to feel that all their work was unappreciated by those whom they so thoroughly commiserated, whose sufferings they were so anxious to relieve.

It was almost dark before they left Berryhill, and then they had to go out of their way to pick up Aunt Letty at Mr. Townsend's house.

'Don't go in whatever you do, girls,' said Herbert; 'we should never get away.'

'Indeed we won't unpack ourselves again before we get home; will we, Clara?'

'Oh, I hope not. I'm very nice now, and so warm. But, Mr. Fitzgerald, is not Mrs. Townsend very queer?'

'Very queer indeed. But you musn't say a word about her before Aunt Letty. They are sworn brothers-in-arms.'

'I won't of course. But, Mr. Fitzgerald, she's very good, is she not?'

'Yes, in her way. Only it's a pity she's so prejudiced.'

'You mean about religion?'

'I mean about everything. If she wears a bonnet on her head, she'll think you very wicked because you wear a hat.'

'Will she? what a very funny woman! But, Mr. Fitzgerald, I shan't give up my hat, let her say what she will.'

'I should rather think not.'

'And Mr. Townsend? we know him a little; he's very good too, isn't he?'

'Do you mean me to answer you truly, or to answer you according to the good-natured idea of never saying any ill of one's neighbour?'

'Oh, both; if you can.'

'Oh both; must I? Well, then, I think him good as a man, but bad as a clergyman.'

'But I thought he worked so very hard as a clergyman?'

'So he does. But if he works evil rather than good, you can't call him a good clergyman. Mind, you would have my opinion; and if I talk treason and heterodoxy and infidelity and papistry, you must only take it for what it's worth.'

'I'm sure you won't talk infidelity.'

'Nor yet treason; and then, moreover, Mr. Townsend would be so much better a clergyman, to my way of thinking, if he would sometimes brush his hair, and occasionally put on a clean surplice. But, remember, not a word of all this to Aunt Letty.'

'Oh dear, no; of course not.'

Mr. Townsend did come out of the house on the little sweep before the door to help Miss Letty up on the car, though it was dark and piercingly cold.

'Well, young ladies, and won't you come in now and warm yourselves?'

They all of course deprecated any such idea, and declared that they were already much too late.

'Richard, mind you take care going down Ballydahan Hill,' said the parson, giving a not unnecessary caution to the servant. 'I came up it just now, and it was one sheet of ice.'

'Now, Richard, do be careful,' said Miss Letty.

'Never fear, miss,' said Richard.

'We'll take care of you,' said Herbert. 'You're not frightened, Lady Clara, are you?'

'Oh, no,' said Clara; and so they started.

It was quite dark and very cold, and there was a sharp hard frost. But the lamps of the car were lighted, and the horse seemed to be on his mettle, for he did his work well. Ballydahan Hill was not above a mile from the glebe, and descending that, Richard, by his young master's orders, got down from his seat and went to the animal's head. Herbert also himself got off, and led his horse down the hill. At first the girls were a little inclined to be frightened, and Miss Letty found herself obliged to remind them that they couldn't melt the frost by screaming. But they all got safely down, and were soon chattering as fast as though they were already safe in the drawing-room of Castle Richmond.

They went on without any accident, till they reached a turn in the road, about two miles from home; and there, all in a moment, quite suddenly, when nobody was thinking about the frost or the danger, down came the poor horse on his side, his feet having gone quite from under him, and a dreadful cracking sound of broken timber gave notice that a shaft was smashed. A shaft at least was smashed; if only no other harm was done!

It can hardly be that Herbert Fitzgerald cared more for such a stranger as Lady Clara Desmond than he did for his own sisters and aunt; but

nevertheless, it was to Lady Clara's assistance that he first betook himself. Perhaps he had seen, or fancied that he saw, that she had fallen with the greatest violence.

'Speak, speak,' said he, as he jumped from his horse close to her side. 'Are you hurt? do speak to me.' And going down on his knees on the hard ground, he essayed to lift her in his arms.

'Oh dear, oh dear!' said she. 'No; I am not hurt; at least I think not—only just my arm a very little. Where is Emmeline? Is Emmeline hurt?'

'No,' said Emmeline, picking herself up. 'But, oh dear, dear, I've lost my muff, and I've spoiled my hat! Where are Mary and Aunt Letty?'

After some considerable confusion it was found that nothing was much damaged except the car, one shaft of which was broken altogether in two. Lady Clara's arm was bruised and rather sore, but the three other ladies had altogether escaped. The quantity of clothes that had been wrapped round them had no doubt enabled them to fall softly.

'And what about the horse, Richard?' asked young Fitzgerald.

'He didn't come upon his knees at all at all, Master Herbert,' said Richard, scrutinizing the animal's legs with the car lamp in his hand. 'I

don't think he's a taste the worse. But the car, Master Herbert, is clane smashed.'

Such being found to be undoubtedly the fact, there was nothing for it but that the ladies should walk home. Herbert again forgot that the age of his aunt imperatively demanded all the assistance that he could lend her, and with many lamentations that fortune and the frost should have used her so cruelly, he gave his arm to Clara.

'But do think of Miss Fitzgerald,' said Clara, speaking gently into his ear.

'Who? oh, my aunt. Aunt Letty never cares for anybody's arm; she always prefers walking alone.'

'Fie, Mr. Fitzgerald, fie! It is impossible to believe such an assertion as that.' And yet Clara did seem to believe it; for she took his proffered arm without further objection.

It was half-past seven when they reached the hall door, and at that time they had all forgotten the misfortune of the car in the fun of the dark frosty walk home. Herbert had found a boy to lead his horse, and Richard was of course left with the ruins in the road.

'And how's your arm now?' asked Herbert, tenderly, as they entered in under the porch.

'Oh, it does not hurt me hardly at all. I don't mind it in the least.' And then the door was opened for them.

They all flocked into the hall, and there they were met by Lady Fitzgerald.

'Oh, mamma,' said Mary, 'I know you're quite frightened out of your life! But there's nothing the matter. The horse tumbled down; but there's nobody hurt.'

'And we had to walk home from the turn to Ballyclough,' said Emmeline. 'But, oh mamma, what's the matter?' They all now looked up at Lady Fitzgerald, and it was evident enough that something was the matter; something to be thought of infinitely more than that accident on the road.

'Oh, Mary, Mary, what is it?' said Aunt Letty, coming forward and taking hold of her sister-in-law's hand. 'Is my brother ill?'

'Sir Thomas is not very well, and I've been waiting for you so long. Where's Herbert? I must speak to Herbert.' And then the mother and son left the hall together.

There was then a silence among the four ladies that were left there standing. At first they followed each other into the drawing-room, all wrapped up as they were and sat on chairs apart, saying nothing to each other. At last Aunt Letty got up.

'You had better go up-stairs with Lady Clara,' said she; 'I will go to your mamma.'

'Oh, Aunt Letty, do send us word; pray send us word,' said Emmeline.

Mary now began to cry. 'I know he's very ill. I'm sure he's very ill. Oh, what shall we do?'

'You had better go up stairs with Lady Clara,' said Aunt Letty. 'I will send you up word immediately.'

'Oh, don't mind me; pray don't mind me,' said Clara. 'Pray, pray, don't take notice of me;' and she rushed forward, and throwing herself on her knees before Emmeline, began to kiss her.

They remained here, heedless of Aunt Letty's advice, for some ten minutes, and then Herbert came to them. The two girls flew at him with questions; while Lady Clara stood by the window, anxious to learn, but unwilling to thrust herself into their family matters.

'My father has been much troubled to-day, and is not well,' said Herbert. 'But I do not think there is anything to frighten us. Come; let us go to dinner.'

The going to dinner was but a sorry farce with any of them; but nevertheless, they went through the ceremony, each for the sake of the others.

'Mayn't we see him?' said the girls to their mother, who did come down into the drawing-room for one moment to speak to Clara.

'Not to-night, loves. He should not be disturbed.' And so that day came to an end; not satisfactorily.

CHAPTER IX.

FAMILY COUNCILS.

When the girls and Aunt Letty went to their chambers that night, Herbert returned to his mother's own dressing-room, and there, seated over the fire with her, discussed the matter of his father's sudden attack. He had been again with his father, and Sir Thomas had seemed glad to have him there; but now he had left him for the night.

'He will sleep now, mother,' said the son; 'he has taken laudanum.'

'I fear he takes that too often now.'

'It was good for him to have it to-night. He did not get too much, for I dropped it for him.' And then they sat silent for a few moments together.

'Mother,' said Herbert, 'who can this man have been?'

'I have no knowledge—no idea—no guess even,' said Lady Fitzgerald.

'It is that man's visit that has upset him.'

'Oh, certainly. I think there is no doubt of that. I was waiting for the man to go, and went in almost before he was out of the house.'

'Well?'

'And I found your father quite prostrated.'

'Not on the floor?'

'No, not exactly on the floor. He was still seated on his chair, but his head was on the table, over his arms.'

'I have often found him in that way, mother.'

'But you never saw him looking as he looked this morning, Herbert. When I went in he was speechless, and he remained so, I should say, for some minutes.'

'Was he senseless?'

'No; he knew me well enough, and grasped me by the hand; and when I would have gone to the bell to ring for assistance, he would not let me. I thought he would have gone into a fit when I attempted it.'

'And what did you do?'

'I sat there by him, with his hand in mine, quite quietly. And then he uttered a long, deep sigh, and—oh, Herbert!'

'Well, mother?'

'At last, he burst into a flood of tears, and sobbed and cried like a child.'

'Mother!'

'He did, so that it was piteous to see him. But it did him good, for he was better after it. And all the time he never let go my hand, but held it and kissed it. And then he took me by the waist, and kissed me, oh, so often. And all the while his tears were running like the tears of a girl.' And Lady Fitzgerald, as she told the story, could not herself refrain from weeping.

'And did he say anything afterwards about this man?'

'Yes; not at first, that is. Of course I asked him who he was as soon as I thought he could bear the question. But he turned away, and merely said that he was a stupid man about some old London business, and that he should have gone to Prendergast. But when, after a while, I pressed him, he said that the man's name was Mollett, and that he had, or pretended to have, some claim upon the city property.'

'A claim on the city property! Why, it's not seven hundred a year altogether. If any Mollett could run away with it all, that loss would not affect him like that.'

'So I said, Herbert; not exactly in those words, but trying to comfort him. He then put it off by declaring that it was the consciousness of his inability to see any one on business which affected him so grievously.'

'It was that he said to me.'

'And there may be something in that, Herbert.'

'Yes; but then what should make him so weak, to begin with? If you remember, mother, he was very well,—more like himself than usual last night.'

'Oh, I observed it. He seemed to like having Clara Desmond there.'

'Didn't he, mother? I observed that too. But then Clara Desmond is such a sweet creature.' The mother looked at her son as he said this, but the son did not notice the look. 'I do wonder what the real truth can be,' he continued. 'Do you think there is anything wrong about the property in general? About this estate, here?'

'No, I don't think that,' said the mother, sadly.

'What can it be then?' But Lady Fitzgerald sat there, and did not answer the question. 'I'll tell you what I will do, mother; I'll go up to London, and see Prendergast, and consult him.'

'Oh, no; you mustn't do that. I am wrong to tell you all this, for he told me to talk to no one. But it would kill me if I didn't speak of it to you.'

'All the same, mother, I think it would be best to consult Prendergast.'

'Not yet, Herbert. I dare say Mr. Prendergast may be a very good sort of man, but we none

of us know him. And if, as is very probable, this is only an affair of health, it would be wrong in you to go to a stranger. It might look——'

'Look what, mother?'

'People might think—he, I mean—that you wanted to interfere.'

'But who ought to interfere on his behalf if I don't?'

'Quite true, dearest; I understand what you mean, and know how good you are. But perhaps Mr. Prendergast might not. He might think you wanted——'

'Wanted what, mother? I don't understand you.'

'Wanted to take the things out of your father's hands.'

'Oh, mother!'

'He doesn't know you. And, what is more, I don't think he knows much of your father. Don't go to him yet.' And Herbert promised that he would not.

'And you don't think that this man was ever here before?' he asked.

'Well, I rather think he was here once before; many years ago—soon after you went to school.'

'So long ago as that?'

'Yes; not that I remember him, or, indeed, ever knew of his coming then, if he did come. But Jones says that she thinks she remembers him.'

'Did Jones see him now?'

'Yes; she was in the hall as he passed through on his way out. And it so happened that she let him in and out too when he came before. That is, if it is the same man.'

'That's very odd.'

'It did not happen here. We were at Tenby for a few weeks in the summer.'

'I remember; you went there with the girls just when I went back to school.'

'Jones was with us, and Richard. We had none other of our own servants. And Jones says that the same man did come then; that he stayed with your father for an hour or two; and that when he left, your father was depressed—almost as he was yesterday. I well remember that. I know that a man did come to him at Tenby; and—oh, Herbert!'

'What is it, mother? Speak out at any rate to me.'

'Since that man came to him at Tenby he has never been like what he was before.'

And then there was more questioning between them about Jones and her remembrances. It must be explained that Jones was a very old and very valued servant. She had originally been brought up as a child by Mrs. Wainwright, in that Dorsetshire parsonage, and had since remained firm to the fortunes of the young lady,

whose maid she had become on her first marriage. As her mistress had been promoted, so had Jones. At first she had been Kitty to all the world, now she was Mrs. Jones to the world at large, Jones to Sir Thomas and her mistress and of late years to Herbert, and known by all manner of affectionate sobriquets to the young ladies. Sometimes they would call her Johnny, and sometimes the Duchess; but doubtless they and Mrs. Jones thoroughly understood each other. By the whole establishment Mrs. Jones was held in great respect, and by the younger portion in extreme awe. Her breakfast and tea she had in a little sitting-room by herself; but the solitude of this was too tremendous for her to endure at dinner-time. At that meal she sat at the head of the table in the servants' hall, though she never troubled herself to carve anything except puddings and pies, for which she had a great partiality, and of which she was supposed to be the most undoubted and severe judge known of anywhere in that part of the country.

She was supposed by all her brother and sister servants to be a very Crœsus for wealth; and wondrous tales were told of the money she had put by. But as she was certainly honest, and supposed to be very generous to certain poor relations in Dorsetshire, some of these stories were probably mythic. It was known, however,

as a fact, that two Castle Richmond butlers, one out-door steward, three neighbouring farmers, and one wickedly ambitious coachman, had endeavoured to tempt her to matrimony—in vain. 'She didn't want none of them,' she told her mistress. 'And, what was more, she wouldn't have none of them.' And therefore she remained Mrs. Jones, with brevet rank.

It seemed, from what Lady Fitzgerald said, that Mrs. Jones's manner had been somewhat mysterious about this man, Mollett. She had endeavoured to reassure and comfort her mistress, saying that nothing would come of it as nothing had come of that other Tenby visit, and giving it as her counsel that the ladies should allow the whole matter to pass by without further notice. But at the same time Lady Fitzgerald had remarked that her manner had been very serious when she first said that she had seen the man before.

'Jones,' Lady Fitzgerald had said to her, very earnestly, 'if you know more about this man than you are telling me, you are bound to speak out, and let me know everything.'

'Who—I, my lady? what could I know? Only he do look to me like the same man, and so I thought it right to say to your ladyship.'

Lady Fitzgerald had seen that there was nothing more to be gained by cross-questioning,

and so she had allowed the matter to drop. But she was by no means satisfied that this servant whom she so trusted did not know more than she had told. And then Mrs. Jones had been with her in those dreadful Dorsetshire days, and an undefined fear began to creep over her very soul.

'God bless you, my child!' said Lady Fitzgerald, as her son got up to leave her. And then she embraced him with more warmth even than was her wont. 'All that we can do at present is to be gentle with him, and not to encourage people around him to talk of his illness.'

On the next morning Lady Fitzgerald did not come down to breakfast, but sent her love to Clara, and begged her guest to excuse her on account of headache. Sir Thomas rarely came in to breakfast, and therefore his absence was not remarkable. His daughters, however, went up to see him, as did also his sister; and they all declared that he was very much better.

'It was some sudden attack, I suppose?' said Clara.

'Yes, very sudden; he has had the same before,' said Herbert. 'But they do not at all effect his intellect or bodily powers. Depression is, I suppose, the name that the doctors would call it.'

And then at last it became noticeable by them that Lady Clara did not use her left arm. 'Oh, Clara!' said Emmeline, 'I see now that you are

hurt. How selfish we have been! Oh dear, oh dear!' And both Emmeline and Mary immediately surrounded her, examining her arm, and almost carrying her to the sofa.

'I don't think it will be much,' said Clara. 'It's only a little stiff.'

'Oh, Herbert, what shall we do? Do look here; the inside of her arm is quite black.'

Herbert, gently touching her hand, did examine the arm, and declared his opinion that she had received a dreadfully violent blow. Emmeline proposed to send for a doctor to pronounce whether or no it were broken. Mary said that she didn't think it was broken, but that she was sure the patient ought not to be moved that day, or probably for a week. Aunt Letty, in the mean time, prescribed a cold-water bandage with great authority, and bounced out of the room to fetch the necessary linen and basin of water.

'It's nothing at all,' continued Clara. 'And indeed I shall go home to-day; indeed I shall.'

'It might be very bad for your arm that you should be moved,' said Herbert.

'And your staying here will not be the least trouble to us. We shall all be so happy to have you; shall we not, Mary?'

'Of course we shall; and so will mamma.

'I am so sorry to be here now,' said Clara, 'when I know you are all in such trouble about

Sir Thomas. But as for going, I shall go as soon as ever you can make it convenient to send me. Indeed I shall.' And so the matter was discussed between them, Aunt Letty in the mean time binding up the bruised arm with cold-water appliances.

Lady Clara was quite firm about going, and, therefore, at about twelve she was sent. I should say taken, for Emmeline insisted on going with her in the carriage. Herbert would have gone also, but he felt that he ought not to leave Castle Richmond that day, on account of his father. But he would certainly ride over, he said, and learn how her arm was the next morning.

'And about Clady, you know,' said Clara.

'I will go on to Clady also. I did send a man there yesterday to see about the flue. It's the flue that's wrong, I know.'

'Oh, thank you; I am so much obliged to you,' said Clara. And then the carriage drove off, and Herbert returned into the morning sitting-room with his sister Mary.

'I'll tell you what it is, Master Herbert,' said Mary.

'Well—what is it?'

'You are going to fall in love with her young ladyship.'

'Am I? Is that all you know about it? And who are you going to fall in love with pray?'

'Oh! his young lordship, perhaps; only he ought to be about ten years older, so that I'm afraid that wouldn't do. But Clara is just the age for you. It really seems as though it were all prepared ready to your hand.'

'You girls always do think that those things are ready prepared;' and so saying, Herbert walked off with great manly dignity to some retreat among his own books and papers, there to meditate whether this thing were in truth prepared for him. It certainly was the fact that the house did seem very blank to him now that Clara was gone; and that he looked forward with impatience to the visit which it was so necessary that he should make on the following day to Clady.

The house at Castle Richmond was very silent and quiet that day. When Emmeline came back, she and her sister remained together. Nothing had been said to them about Mollett's visit, and they had no other idea than that this lowness of spirits on their father's part, to which they had gradually become accustomed, had become worse and more dangerous to his health than ever.

Aunt Letty talked much about it to Herbert, to Lady Fitzgerald, to Jones, and to her brother, and was quite certain that she had penetrated to the depth of the whole matter. That nasty city property, she said, which had come with her

grandmother, had always given the family more trouble than it was worth. Indeed, her grand mother had been a very troublesome woman altogether; and no wonder, for though she was a Protestant herself, she had had Papist relations in Lancashire. She distinctly remembered to have heard that there was some flaw in the title of that property, and she knew that it was very hard to get some of the tenants to pay any rent. That she had always heard. She was quite sure that this man was some person laying a claim to it, and threatening to prosecute his claim at law. It was a thousand pities that her brother should allow such a trifle as this,—for after all it was but a trifle, to fret his spirits and worry him in this way. But it was the wretched state of his health: were he once himself again, all such annoyances as that would pass him by like the wind.

It must be acknowledged that Aunt Letty's memory in this respect was not exactly correct; for, as it happened, Sir Thomas held his little property in the city of London by as firm a tenure as the laws and customs of his country could give him; and seeing that his income thence arising came from ground rents near the river, on which property stood worth some hundreds of thousands, it was not very probable that his tenants should be in arrear. But what she said had

some effect upon Herbert. He was not quite sure whether this might not be the cause of his father's grief; and if the story did not have much effect upon Lady Fitzgerald, at any rate it did as well as any other to exercise the ingenuity and affection of Aunt Letty.

Sir Thomas passed the whole of that day in his own room; but during a great portion of the day either his wife, or sister, or son was with him. They endeavoured not to leave him alone with his own thoughts, feeling conscious that something preyed upon his mind, though ignorant as to what that something might be.

He was quite aware of the nature of their thoughts; perfectly conscious of the judgment they had formed respecting him. He knew that he was subjecting himself, in the eyes not only of his own family but of all those around him, to suspicions which must be injurious to him, and yet he could not shake off the feeling that depressed him.

But at last he did resolve to make an attempt at doing so. For some time in the evening he was altogether alone, and he then strove to force his mind to work upon the matter which occupied it,—to arrange his ideas, and bring himself into a state in which he could make a resolution. For hours he had sat,—not thinking upon this subject, for thought is an exertion which requires a com-

bination of ideas and results in the deducing of conclusions from premises; and no such effort as that had he hitherto made,—but endeavouring to think while he allowed the matter of his grief to lie ever before his mind's eye.

He had said to himself over and over again, that it behoved him to make some great effort to shake off this incubus that depressed him; but yet no such effort had hitherto been even attempted. Now at last he arose and shook himself, and promised to himself that he would be a man. It might be that the misfortune under which he groaned was heavy, but let one's sorrow be what it may, there is always a better and a worse way of meeting it. Let what trouble may fall on a man's shoulders, a man may always bear it manfully. And are not troubles when so borne half cured? It is the flinching from pain which makes pain so painful.

This truth came home to him as he sat there that day, thinking what he should do, endeavouring to think in what way he might best turn himself. But there was this that was especially grievous to him, that he had no friend whom he might consult in this matter. It was a sorrow, the cause of which he could not explain to his own family, and in all other troubles he had sought assistance and looked for counsel there and there only. He had had one best, steadiest,

dearest, truest counsellor, and now it had come to pass that things were so placed that in this great trouble he could not go to her.

And now a friend was so necessary to him! He felt that he was not fit to judge how he himself should act in this terrible emergency; that it was absolutely necessary for him that he should allow himself to be guided by some one else. But to whom should he appeal?

'He is a cold man,' said he to himself, as one name did occur to him, 'very cold, almost unfeeling; but he is honest and just.' And then again he sat and thought. 'Yes, he is honest and just; and what should I want better than honesty and justice?' And then, shuddering as he resolved, he did resolve that he would send for this honest and just man. He would send for him; or, perhaps better still, go to him. At any rate, he would tell him the whole truth of his grief, and then act as the cold, just man should bid him.

But he need not do this yet—not quite yet. So at least he said to himself, falsely. If a man decide with a fixed decision that his tooth should come out, or his leg be cut off, let the tooth come out or the leg be cut off on the earliest possible opportunity. It is the flinching from such pain that is so grievously painful.

But it was something to have brought his mind

to bear with a fixed purpose upon these things, and to have resolved upon what he would do, though he still lacked strength to put his resolution immediately to the proof.

Then, later in the evening, his son came and sat with him, and he was able in some sort to declare that the worst of that evil day had passed from him. 'I shall breakfast with you all to-morrow,' he said, and as he spoke a faint smile passed across his face.

'Oh! I hope you will,' said Herbert; 'we shall be so delighted: but, father, do not exert yourself too soon.'

'It will do me good, I think.'

'I am sure it will, if the fatigue be not too much.'

'The truth is, Herbert, I have allowed this feeling to grow upon me till I have become weak under it. I know that I ought to make an exertion to throw it off, and it is possible that I may succeed.'

Herbert muttered some few hopeful words, but he found it very difficult to know what he ought to say. That his father had some secret he was quite sure; and it is hard to talk to a man about his secret, without knowing what that secret is.

'I have allowed myself to fall into a weak state,' continued Sir Thomas, speaking slowly,

'while by proper exertion I might have avoided it.'

'You have been very ill, father,' said Herbert.

'Yes, I have been ill, very ill, certainly. But I do not know that any doctor could have helped me.'

'Father——'

'No, Herbert; do not ask me questions; do not inquire; at any rate, not at present. I will endeavour—now at least I will endeavour—to do my duty. But do not urge me by questions, or appear to notice me if I am infirm.'

'But, father,—if we could comfort you?'

'Ah! if you could. But, never mind, I will endeavour to shake off this depression. And, Herbert, comfort your mother; do not let her think much of all this, if it can be helped.'

'But how can it be helped?'

And tell her this: there is a matter that troubles my mind.'

'Is it about the property, father?'

'No—yes; it certainly is about the property in one sense.'

'Then do not heed it; we shall none of us heed it. Who has so good a right to say so as I?'

'Bless you, my darling boy! But, Herbert, such things must be heeded—more or less, you know: but you may tell your mother this, and perhaps it may comfort her. I have made up my mind to

go to London and to see Prendergast; I will explain the whole of this thing to him, and as he bids me so will I act.'

This was thought to be satisfactory to a certain extent both by the mother and son. They would have been better pleased had he opened his heart to them and told them everything; but that it was clear he could not bring himself to do. This Mr. Prendergast they had heard was a good man; and in his present state it was better that he should seek counsel of any man than allow his sorrow to feed upon himself alone.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECTOR OF DRUMBARROW AND HIS WIFE.

HERBERT FITZGERALD, in speaking of the Rev. Æneas Townsend to Lady Clara Desmond, had said that in his opinion the reverend gentleman was a good man, but a bad clergyman. But there were not a few in the county Cork who would have said just the reverse, and declared him to be a bad man, but a good clergyman. There were others, indeed, who knew him well, who would have declared him to be perfect in both respects, and others again who thought him in both respects to be very bad. Amidst these great diversities of opinion I will venture on none of my own, but will attempt to describe him.

In Ireland stanch Protestantism consists too much in a hatred of Papistry—in that rather than in a hatred of those errors against which we Protestants are supposed to protest. Hence the cross—which should, I presume, be the emblem of salvation to us all—creates a feeling of dismay

and often of disgust instead of love and reverence; and the very name of a saint savours in Irish Protestant ears of idolatry, although Irish Protestants on every Sunday profess to believe in a communion of such. These are the feelings rather than the opinions of the most Protestant of Irish Protestants, and it is intelligible that they should have been produced by the close vicinity of Roman Catholic worship in the minds of men who are energetic and excitable, but not always discreet or argumentative.

One of such was Mr. Townsend, and few men carried their Protestant fervour further than he did. A cross was to him what a red cloth is supposed to be to a bull; and so averse was he to the intercession of saints, that he always regarded as a wolf in sheep's clothing a certain English clergyman who had written to him a letter dated from the feast of St. Michael and All Angels. On this account Herbert Fitzgerald took upon himself to say that he regarded him as a bad clergyman: whereas, most of his Protestant neighbours looked upon this enthusiasm as his chief excellence.

And this admiration for him induced his friends to overlook what they must have acknowledged to be defects in his character. Though he had a good living—at least, what the laity in speaking of clerical incomes is generally

inclined to call a good living, we will say amounting in value to four hundred pounds a year—he was always in debt. This was the more inexcusable as he had no children, and had some small private means.

And nobody knew why he was in debt—in which word nobody he himself must certainly be included. He had no personal expenses of his own; his wife, though she was a very queer woman, as Lady Clara had said, could hardly be called an extravagant woman; there was nothing large or splendid about the way of living at the glebe; anybody who came there, both he and she were willing to feed as long as they chose to stay, and a good many in this way they did feed; but they never invited guests; and as for giving regular fixed dinner-parties, as parish rectors do in England, no such idea ever crossed the brain of either Mr. or Mrs. Townsend.

That they were both charitable all the world admitted; and their admirers professed that hence arose all their difficulties. But their charities were of a most indiscreet kind. Money they rarely had to give, and therefore they would give promises to pay. While their credit with the butcher and baker was good they would give meat and bread; and both these functionaries had by this time learned that, though Mr. Townsend might not be able to pay such bills himself, his

friends would do so, sooner or later, if duly pressed. And therefore the larder at Drumbarrow Glebe—that was the name of the parish—was never long empty, and then again it was never long full.

But neither Mr. nor Mrs. Townsend were content to bestow their charities without some other object than that of relieving material wants by their alms. Many infidels, Mr. Townsend argued, had been made believers by the miracle of the loaves and fishes; and therefore it was permissible for him to make use of the same means for drawing over proselytes to the true church. If he could find hungry Papists and convert them into well-fed Protestants by one and the same process, he must be doing a double good, he argued;—could by no possibility be doing an evil.

Such being the character of Mr. Townsend, it will not be thought surprising that he should have his warm admirers and his hot detractors. And they who were inclined to be among the latter were not slow to add up certain little disagreeable eccentricities among the list of his faults,—as young Fitzgerald had done in the matter of the dirty surplices.

Mr. Townsend's most uncompromising foe for many years had been the Rev. Bernard M'Carthy, the parish priest for the same parish of Drum-

barrow. Father Bernard, as he was called by his own flock, or Father Barney, as the Protestants in derision were delighted to name him, was much more a man of the world than his Protestant colleague. He did not do half so many absurd things as did Mr. Townsend, and professed to laugh at what he called the Protestant madness of the rector. But he also had been an eager, I may also say, a malicious antagonist. What he called the 'souping' system of the Protestant clergyman stank in his nostrils—that system by which, as he stated, the most ignorant of men were to be induced to leave their faith by the hope of soup, or other food. He was as firmly convinced of the inward, heart-destroying iniquity of the parson as the parson was of that of the priest. And so these two men had learned to hate each other. And yet neither of them were bad men.

I do not wish it to be understood that this sort of feeling always prevailed in Irish parishes between the priest and the parson even before the days of the famine. I myself have met a priest at a parson's table, and have known more than one parish in which the Protestant and Roman Catholic clergymen lived together on amicable terms. But such a feeling as that above represented was common, and was by no means held as proof that the parties them-

selves were quarrelsome or malicious. It was a part of their religious convictions, and who dares to interfere with the religious convictions of a clergyman?

On the day but one after that on which the Castle Richmond ladies had been thrown from their car on the frosty road, Mr. Townsend and Farther Bernard were brought together in an amicable way, or in a way that was intended to be amicable, for the first time in their lives. The relief committee for the district in which they both lived was one and the same, and it was of course well that both should act on it. When the matter was first arranged, Father Bernard took the bull by the horns and went there; but Mr. Townsend, hearing this, did not do so. But now that it had become evident that much work, and for a long time, would have to be performed at these committees, it was clear that Mr. Townsend, as a Protestant clergyman, could not remain away without neglecting his duty. And so, after many mental struggles and questions of conscience, the parson agreed to meet the priest.

The point had been very deeply discussed between the rector and his wife. She had given it as her opinion that priest M'Carthy was pitch, pitch itself in its blackest turpitude, and as such could not be touched without defilement. Had

not all the Protestant clergymen of Ireland in a body, or at any rate, all those who were worth anything, who could with truth be called Protestant clergymen, had they not all refused to enter the doors of the National schools because they could not do so without sharing their ministration there with papist priests; with priests of the altar of Baal, as Mrs. Townsend called them? And should they now yield, when, after all, the assistance needed was only for the body—not for the soul?

It may be seen from this that the lady's mind was not in its nature logical; but the extreme absurdity of her arguments, though they did not ultimately have the desired effect, by no means came home to the understanding of her husband. He thought that there was a great deal in what she said, and almost felt that he was yielding to instigations from the evil one; but public opinion was too strong for him; public opinion and the innate kindness of his own heart. He felt that at this very moment he ought to labour specially for the bodies of these poor people, as at other times he would labour specially for their souls; and so he yielded.

'Well,' said his wife to him as he got off his car at his own door after the meeting, 'what have you done?' One might have imagined from her tone of voice and her manner that she ex-

pected, or at least hoped to hear that the priest had been absolutely exterminated and made away with in the good fight.

Mr. Townsend made no immediate answer, but proceeded to divest himself of his rusty outside coat, and to rub up his stiff, grizzled, bristly, uncombed hair with both his hands, as was his wont when he was not quite satisfied with the state of things.

'I suppose he was there?' said Mrs. Townsend.

'Oh, yes, he was there. He is never away, I take it, when there is any talking to be done.' Now Mr. Townsend dearly loved to hear himself talk, but no man was louder against the sins of other orators. And then he began to ask how many minutes it wanted to dinner-time.

Mrs. Townsend knew his ways. She would not have a ghost of a chance of getting from him a true and substantial account of what had really passed if she persevered in direct questions to the effect. So she pretended to drop the matter, and went and fetched her lord's slippers, the putting on of which constituted his evening toilet; and then, after some little hurrying inquiry in the kitchen, promised him his dinner in fifteen minutes.

'Was Herbert Fitzgerald there?'

'Oh yes; he is always there. He's a nice young fellow; a very fine young fellow; but—'

'But what?'

'He thinks he understands the Irish Roman Catholics, but he understands them no more than—than—than this slipper,' he said, having in vain cudgelled his brain for a better comparison.

'You know what Aunt Letty says about him. She doubts he isn't quite right, you know.'

Mrs. Townsend by this did not mean to insinuate that Herbert was at all afflicted in that way which we attempt to designate, when we say that one of our friends is not all right, and at the same time touch our heads with our forefinger. She had intended to convey an impression that the young man's religious ideas were not exactly of that stanch, true-blue description which she admired.

'Well, he has just come from Oxford, you know,' said Mr. Townsend: 'and at the present moment Oxford is the most dangerous place to which a young man can be sent.'

'And Sir Thomas would send him there, though I remember telling his aunt over and over again how it would be.' And Mrs. Townsend as she spoke, shook her head sorrowfully.

'I don't mean to say, you know, that he's absolutely bitten.'

'Oh, I know—I understand. When they come to crosses and candlesticks, the next step to

the glory of Mary is a very easy one. I would sooner send a young man to Rome than to Oxford. At the one he might be shocked and disgusted; but at the other he is cajoled, and cheated, and ruined.' And then Mrs. Townsend threw herself back in her chair, and threw her eyes up towards the ceiling.

But there was no hypocrisy or pretence in this expression of her feelings. She did in her heart of hearts believe that there was some college or club of papists at Oxford, emissaries of the Pope or of the Jesuits. In her moments of sterner thought the latter were the enemies she most feared; whereas, when she was simply pervaded by her usual chronic hatred of the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy, she was wont to inveigh most against the Pope. And this college, she maintained, was fearfully successful in drawing away the souls of young English students. Indeed, at Oxford a man had no chance against the devil. Things were better at Cambridge; though even there there was great danger. Look at A—— and Z——; and she would name two perverts to the Church of Rome, of whom she had learned that they were Cambridge men. But, thank God, Trinity College still stood firm. Her idea was, that if there were left any real Protestant truth in the Church of England, that Church should look to feed her lambs by the hands of

shepherds chosen from that seminary, and from that seminary only.

'But isn't dinner nearly ready?' said Mr. Townsend, whose ideas were not so exclusively Protestant as were those of his wife. 'I haven't had a morsel since breakfast.' And then his wife, who was peculiarly anxious to keep him in a good humour that all might come out about Father Barney, made another little visit to the kitchen.

At last the dinner was served. The weather was very cold, and the rector and his wife considered it more cosy to use only the parlour, and not to migrate into the cold air of a second room. Indeed, during the winter months the drawing-room of Drumbarrow Glebe was only used for visitors, and for visitors who were not intimate enough in the house to be placed upon the worn chairs and threadbare carpet of the dining-parlour. And very cold was that drawing-room found to be by each visitor.

But the parlour was warm enough; warm and cosy, though perhaps at times a little close; and of evenings there would pervade it a smell of whisky punch, not altogether acceptable to unaccustomed nostrils. Not that the rector of Drumbarrow was by any means an intemperate man. His single tumbler of whisky toddy, repeated only on Sundays and some other rare

occasions, would by no means equal, in point of drinking, the ordinary port of an ordinary English clergyman. But whisky punch does leave behind a savour of its intrinsic virtues, delightful no doubt to those who have imbibed its grosser elements, but not equally acceptable to others who may have been less fortunate.

During dinner there was no conversation about Herbert Fitzgerald, or the committee, or Father Barney. The old gardener, who waited at table with all his garden clothes on him, and whom the neighbours, with respectful deference, called Mr. Townsend's butler, was a Roman Catholic; as, indeed, were all the servants at the glebe, and as are, necessarily, all the native servants in that part of the country. And though Mr. and Mrs. Townsend put great trust in their servant Jerry as to the ordinary duties of gardening, driving, and butlering, they would not knowingly trust him with a word of their habitual conversation about the things around them. Their idea was, that every word so heard was carried to the priest, and that the priest kept a book in which every word so uttered was written down. If this were so through the parish, the priest must in truth have had something to do, both for himself and his private secretary; for, in spite of all precautions that were taken, Jerry and Jerry's brethren no doubt did hear much of what was

said. The repetitions to the priest, however, I must take leave to doubt.

But after dinner, when the hot water and whisky were on the table, when the two old arm-chairs were drawn cozily up on the rug, each with an old footstool before it; when the faithful wife had mixed that glass of punch—or jug rather, for, after the old fashion, it was brewed in such a receptacle; and when, to inspire increased confidence, she had put into it a small extra modicum of the eloquent spirit, then the mouth of the rector was opened, and Mrs. Townsend was made happy.

'And so Father Barney and I have met at last,' said he, rather cheerily, as the hot fumes of the toddy regaled his nostrils.

'And how did he behave now?'

'Well, he was decent enough—that is, as far as absolute behaviour went. You can't have a silk purse from off a sow's ear, you know.'

'No, indeed; and goodness knows there's plenty of the sow's ear about him. But now, Æneas, dear, do tell me how it all was, just from the beginning.'

'He was there before me,' said the husband.

'Catch a weasel asleep!' said the wife.

'I didn't catch him asleep at any rate,' continued he. 'He was there before me; but when

I went into the little room where they hold the meeting——'

'It's at Berryhill, isn't it?'

'Yes, at the Widow Casey's. To see that woman bowing and scraping and curtsying to Father Barney, and she his own mother's brother's daughter, was the best thing in the world.'

'That was just to do him honour before the quality, you know.'

'Exactly. When I went in, there was nobody there but his reverence and Master Herbert.'

'As thick as possible, I suppose. Dear, dear; isn't it dreadful!——Did I put sugar enough in it, Æneas?'

'Well, I don't know; perhaps you may give me another small lump. At any rate, you didn't forget the whisky.'

'I'm sure it isn't a taste too strong—and after such work as you've had to-day.——And so young Fitzgerald and Father Barney——'

'Yes, there they were with their heads together. It was something about a mill they were saying.'

'Oh, it's perfectly dreadful!'

'But Herbert stopped, and introduced me at once to Father Barney.'

'What! a regular introduction? I like that, indeed.'

'He didn't do it altogether badly. He said something about being glad to see two gentlemen together——'

'A gentleman, indeed!'

'——who were both so anxious to do the best they could in the parish, and whose influence was so great—or something to that effect. And then we shook hands.'

'You did shake hands?'

'Oh, yes; if I went there at all, it was necessary that I should do that.'

'I am very glad it was not me, that's all. I don't think I could shake hands with Father Barney.'

'There's no knowing what you can do, my dear, till you try.'

'H—m,' said Mrs. Townsend, meaning to signify thereby that she was still strong in the strength of her own impossibilities.

'And then there was a little general conversation about the potato, for no one came in for a quarter of an hour or so. The priest said that they were as badly off in Limerick and Clare as we are here. Now, I don't believe that; and when I asked him how he knew, he quoted the "Freeman."'

'The "Freeman," indeed! Just like him. I wonder it wasn't the "Nation."' In Mrs. Townsend's estimation, the parish priest was

much to blame because he did not draw his public information from some newspaper specially addicted to the support of the Protestant cause.

'And then Somers came in, and he took the chair. I was very much afraid at one time that Father Barney was going to seat himself there.'

'You couldn't possibly have stood that?'

'I had made up my mind what to do. I should have walked about the room, and looked on the whole affair as altogether irregular,—as though there was no chairman. But Somers was of course the proper man.'

'And who else came?'

'There was O'Leary, from Boherbue.'

'He was another Papist?'

'Oh, yes; there was a majority of them. There was Greilly, the man who has got that large take of land over beyond Banteer; and then Father Barney's coadjutor came in.'

'What! that wretched-looking man from Gortnaclough?'

'Yes; he's the curate of the parish, you know.'

'And did you shake hands with him too?'

'Indeed I did; and you never saw a fellow look so ashamed of himself in your life.'

'Well, there isn't much shame about them generally.'

'And there wasn't much about him by-and-

by. You never heard a man talk such trash in your life, till Somers put him down.'

'Oh, he was put down? I'm glad of that.'

'And to do Father Barney justice, he did tell him to hold his tongue. The fool began to make a regular set speech.'

'Father Barney, I suppose, didn't choose that anybody should do that but himself.'

'He did enough for the two, certainly. I never heard a man so fond of his own voice. What he wants is to rule it all just his own way.'

'Of course he does; and that's just what you won't let him do. What other reason can there be for your going there?'

And so the matter was discussed. What absolute steps were taken by the committee; how they agreed to buy so much meal of such a merchant, at such a price, and with such funds; how it was to be resold, and never given away on any pretext; how Mr. Somers had explained that giving away their means was killing the goose that laid the golden eggs, when the young priest, in an attitude for oratory, declared that the poor had no money with which to make the purchase; and how in a few weeks' time they would be able to grind their own flour at Herbert Fitzgerald's mill;—all this was also told. But the telling did not give so much gratification to Mrs. Townsend as the sly hits against the two priests.

And then, while they were still in the middle of all this; when the punch-jug had given way to the teapot, and the rector was beginning to bethink himself that a nap in his arm-chair would be very refreshing, Jerry came into the room to announce that Richard had come over from Castle Richmond with a note for 'his riverence.' And so Richard was shown in.

Now Richard might very well have sent in his note by Jerry, which after all contained only some information with reference to a list of old women which Herbert Fitzgerald had promised to send over to the glebe. But Richard knew that the minister would wish to chat with him, and Richard himself had no indisposition for a little conversation.

'I hope yer riverences is quite well then,' said Richard, as he tendered his note, making a double bow, so as to include them both.

'Pretty well, thank you,' said Mrs. Townsend. 'And how's all the family?'

'Well, then, they're all rightly, considhering. The Masther's no just what he war, you know, ma'am.'

'I'm afraid not—I'm afraid not,' said the rector. 'You'll not take a glass of spirits, Richard?'

'Yer riverence knows I never does that,' said Richard, with somewhat of a conscious look of high morality, for he was a rigid teetotaller.

'And do you mean to say that you stick to that always?' said Mrs. Townsend, who firmly believed that no good could come out of Nazareth, and that even abstinence from whisky must be bad if accompanied by anything in the shape of a Roman Catholic ceremony.

'I do mean to say, ma'am, that I never touched a dhrop of anything sthronger than wather, barring tay, since the time I got the pledge from the blessed apostle.' And Richard boldly crossed himself in the presence of them both. They knew well whom he meant by the blessed apostle: it was Father Mathew.

'Temperance is a very good thing, however we may come by it,' said Mr. Townsend, who meant to imply by this that Richard's temperance had been come by in the worst way possible.

'That's thrue for you, sir,' said Richard; 'but I never knew any pledge kept, only the blessed apostle's.' By which he meant to imply that no sanctity inherent in Mr. Townsend's sacerdotal proceedings could be of any such efficacy.

And then Mr. Townsend read the note. 'Ah, yes,' said he; 'tell Mr. Herbert that I'm very much obliged to him. There will be no other answer necessary.'

'Very well, yer riverence, I'll be sure to give Mr. Herbert the message.' And Richard made a sign as though he were going.

'But tell me, Richard,' said Mrs. Townsend, 'is Sir Thomas any better? for we have been really very uneasy about him.'

'Indeed and he is, ma'am; a dail betther this morning, the Lord be praised.'

'It was a kind of a fit, wasn't it, Richard?' asked the parson.

'A sort of a fit of illness of some kind, I'm thinking,' said Richard, who had no mind to speak of his family's secrets out of doors. Whatever he might be called upon to tell the priest, at any rate he was not called on to tell anything to the parson.

'But it was very sudden this time, wasn't it, Richard?' asked the lady; 'immediately after that strange man was shown into his room—eh?'

'I'm sure, ma'am, I can't say; but I don't think he was a ha'porth worse than ordinar, till after the gentleman went away. I did hear that he did his business with the gentleman, just as usual like.'

'And then he fell into a fit, didn't he, Richard?'

'Not that I heard of, ma'am. He did a dail of talking about some law business, I did hear our Mrs. Jones say; and then afther he warn't just the betther of it.'

'Was that all?'

'And I don't think he's none the worse for it

neither, ma'am; for the masther do seem to have more life in him this day than I'se seen this many a month. Why, he's been out and about with her ladyship in the pony-carriage all the morning.'

'Has he now? Well, I'm delighted to hear that. It is some trouble about the English estates, I believe, that vexes him?'

'Faix, then, ma'am, I don't just know what it is that ails him, unless it be just that he has too much money for to know what to do wid it. That'd be the sore vexation to me, I know.'

'Well; ah, yes; I suppose I shall see Mrs. Jones to-morrow, or at latest the day after,' said Mrs. Townsend, resolving to pique the man by making him understand that she could easily learn all that she wished to learn from the woman: 'a great comfort Mrs. Jones must be to her ladyship.'

'Oh yes, ma'am; 'deed 'an she is,' said Richard; ''specially in the matter of puddins and pies, and such like.'

He was not going to admit Mrs. Jones's superiority, seeing that he had lived in the family long before his present mistress's marriage.

'And in a great many other things too, Richard. She's quite a confidential servant. That's because she's a Protestant, you know.'

Now of all men, women, and creatures living,

Richard the coachman of Castle Richmond was the most good tempered. No amount of anger or scolding, no professional misfortune—such as the falling down of his horse upon the ice, no hardship—such as three hours' perpetual rain when he was upon the box—would make him cross. To him it was a matter of perfect indifference if he were sent off with his car just before breakfast, or called away to some stable work as the dinner was about to smoke in the servants' hall. He was a great eater, but what he didn't eat one day he could eat the next. Such things never ruffled him, nor was he ever known to say that such a job wasn't his work. He was always willing to nurse a baby, or dig potatoes, or cook a dinner, to the best of his ability, when asked to do so; but he could not endure to be made less of than a Protestant; and of all Protestants he could not endure to be made less of than Mrs. Jones.

'Cause she's a Protestant, is it, ma'am?'

'Of course, Richard; you can't but see that Protestants are more trusted, more respected, more thought about than Romanists, can you?'

'Deed then I don't know, ma'am.'

'But look at Mrs. Jones.'

'Oh, I looks at her often enough; and she's well enough too for a woman. But we all know her weakness.'

'What's that, Richard?' asked Mrs. Townsend, with some interest expressed in her tone; for she was not above listening to a little scandal, even about the servants of her great neighbours.

'Why, she do often talk about things she don't understand. But she's a great hand at puddins and pies, and that's what one mostly looks for in a woman.'

This was enough for Mrs. Townsend for the present, and so Richard was allowed to take his departure, in full self-confidence that he had been one too many for the parson's wife.

'Jerry,' said Richard, as they walked out into the yard together to get the Castle Richmond pony, 'does they often thry to make a Prothestant of you now?'

'Prothestants be d——,' said Jerry, who by no means shared in Richard's good gifts as to temper.

'Well, I wouldn't say that; at laist, not of all of 'em.'

'The likes of them's used to it,' said Jerry.

And then Richard, not waiting to do further battle on behalf of his Protestant friends, trotted out of the yard.

CHAPTER XI.

SECOND LOVE.

On the day after Clara's departure, Herbert did, as a matter of course, make his promised visit at Desmond Court. It was on that day that Sir Thomas had been driving about in the pony-carriage with Lady Fitzgerald, as Richard had reported. Herbert had been with his father in the morning, and then having seen him and his mother well packed up in their shawls and cloaks, had mounted his horse and ridden off.

'I may be kept some time,' said he, 'as I have promised to go on to Clady, and see after that soup kitchen.'

'I shouldn't wonder if Herbert became attached to Clara Desmond,' said the mother to Sir Thomas, soon after they had begun their excursion.

'Do you think so?' said the baronet; and his tone was certainly not exactly that of approbation.

'Well, yes; I certainly do think it probable.

I am sure he admires her, and I think it very likely to come to more. Would there be any objection?'

'They are both very young,' said Sir Thomas.

'But in Herbert's position will not a young marriage be the best thing for him?'

'And she has no fortune; not a shilling. If he does marry young, quite young you know, it might be prudent that his wife should have something of her own.'

'They'd live here,' said Lady Fitzgerald, who knew that of all men her husband was usually most free from mercenary feelings and an over-anxiety as to increased wealth, either for himself or for his children; 'and I think it would be such a comfort to you. Herbert, you see, is so fond of county business, and so little anxious for what young men generally consider pleasure.'

There was nothing more said about it at that moment; for the question in some measure touched upon money matters and considerations as to property, from all of which Lady Fitzgerald at present wished to keep her husband's mind free. But towards the end of the drive he himself again referred to it.

'She is a nice girl, isn't she?'

'Very nice, I think; as far as I've seen her.'

'She is pretty, certainly.'

'Very pretty; more than pretty; much more. She will be beautiful.'

'But she is such a mere child. You do not think that anything will come of it immediately; —not quite immediately?'

'Oh no; certainly not quite immediately. I think Herbert is not calculated to be very sudden in any such feelings, or in the expression of them: but I do think such an event very probable before the winter is over.'

In the mean time Herbert spent the whole day over at Desmond Court, or at Clady. He found the countess delighted to see him, and both she and Lady Clara went on with him to Clady. It was past five and quite dark before he reached Castle Richmond, so that he barely got home in time to dress for dinner.

The dinner-party that evening was more pleasant than usual. Sir Thomas not only dined with them, but came into the drawing-room after dinner, and to a certain extent joined in their conversation. Lady Fitzgerald could see that this was done by a great effort; but it was not remarked by Aunt Letty and the others, who were delighted to have him with them, and to see him once more interested about their interests.

And now the building of the mill had been settled, and the final orders were to be

given by Herbert at the spot on the following morning.

'We can go with you to Berryhill, I suppose, can't we?' said Mary.

'I shall be in a great hurry,' said Herbert, who clearly did not wish to be encumbered by his sisters on this special expedition.

'And why are you to be in such a hurry to-morrow?' asked Aunt Letty.

"Well, I shall be hurried; I have promised to go to Clady again, and I must be back here early, and must get another horse.

'Why, Herbert, you are becoming a Hercules of energy,' said his father, smiling: 'you will have enough to do if you look to all the soup kitchens on the Desmond property as well as our own.'

'I made a sort of promise about this particular affair at Clady, and I must carry it out,' said Herbert.

'And you'll pay your devoirs to the fair Lady Clara on your way home of course,' said Mary.

'More than probable,' he replied.

'And stay so late again that you'll hardly be here in time for dinner,' continued Mary: to which little sally her brother vouchsafed no answer.

But Emmeline said nothing. Lady Clara was specially her friend, and she was too anxious to

secure such a sister-in-law to make any joke upon such a subject.

On that occasion nothing more was said about it; but Sir Thomas hoped within his heart that his wife was right in prophesying that his son would do nothing sudden in this matter.

On the following morning young Fitzgerald gave the necessary orders at Berryhill very quickly, and then coming back remounted another horse without going into the house. Then he trotted off to Clady, passing the gate of Desmond Court without calling; did what he had promised to do at Clady, or rather that which he had made to stand as an excuse for again visiting that part of the world so quickly; and after that, with a conscience let us hope quite clear, rode up the avenue at Desmond Court. It was still early in the day when he got there, probably not much after two o'clock; and yet Mary had been quite correct in foretelling that he would only be home just in time for dinner.

But, nevertheless, he had not seen Lady Desmond. Why or how it had occurred that she had been absent from the drawing-room the whole of the two hours which he had passed in the house, it may be unnecessary to explain. Such, however, had been the fact. The first five minutes had been passed in inquiries after the bruise, and, it must be owned, in a surgical

inspection of the still discoloured arm. 'It must be very painful,' he had said, looking into her face, as though by doing so he could swear that he would so willingly bear all the pain himself, if it were only possible to make such an exchange.

'Not very,' she had answered, smiling. 'It is only a little stiff. I can't quite move it easily.'

And then she lifted it up, and afterwards dropped it with a little look of pain that ran through his heart.

The next five minutes were taken up in discussing the case of the recusant boiler, and then Clara discovered that she had better go and fetch her mother. But against the immediate taking of this step he had alleged some valid reason, and so they had gone on, till the dark night admonished him that he could do no more than save the dinner hour at Castle Richmond.

The room was nearly dark when he left her, and she got up and stood at the front window, so that, unseen, she might see his figure as he rode off from the house. He mounted his horse within the quadrangle, and coming out at the great old-fashioned ugly portal, galloped off across the green park with a loose rein and a happy heart. What is it the song says?

'Oh, ladies, beware of a gay young knight
Who loves and who rides away.'

There was at Clara's heart, as she stood there at the window, some feeling of the expediency of being beware, some shadow of doubt as to the wisdom of what she had done. He rode away gaily, with a happy spirit, for he had won that on the winning of which he had been intent. No necessity for caution presented itself to him. He had seen and loved; had then asked, and had not asked in vain.

She stood gazing after him, as long as her straining eye could catch any outline of his figure as it disappeared through the gloom of the evening. As long as she could see him, or even fancy that she still saw him, she thought only of his excellence; of his high character, his kind heart, his talents—which in her estimation were ranked perhaps above their real value—his tastes, which coincided so well with her own, his quiet yet manly bearing, his useful pursuits, his gait, appearance, and demeanour. All these were of a nature to win the heart of such a girl as Clara Desmond; and then, probably, in some indistinct way, she remembered the broad acres to which he was the heir, and comforted herself by reflecting that this at least was a match which none would think disgraceful for a daughter even of an Earl of Desmond.

But sadder thoughts did come when that figure had wholly disappeared. Her eye, look-

ing out into the darkness, could not but see another figure on which it had often in past times delighted almost unconsciously to dwell. There, walking on that very road, another lover, another Fitzgerald, had sworn that he loved her; and had truly sworn so, as she well knew. She had never doubted his truth to her, and did not doubt it now;—and yet she had given herself away to another.

And in many things he too, that other lover, had been noble and gracious, and fit for a woman to love. In person he exceeded all that she had ever seen or dreamed of; and why should we think that personal excellence is to count for nothing in female judgment, when in that of men it ranks so immeasurably above all other excellences? His bearing, too, was chivalrous and bold, his language full of poetry, and his manner of loving eager, impetuous, and of a kin to worship. Then, too, he was now in misfortune; and when has that failed to soften even the softness of a woman's heart?

It was impossible that she should not make comparisons, comparisons that were so distasteful to her; impossible, also, that she should not accuse herself of some falseness to that first lover. The time to us, my friends, seems short enough since she was walking there, and listening with childish delight to Owen's protestations of love.

It was but little more than one year since: but to her those months had been very long. And, reader, if thou hast arrived at any period of life which enables thee to count thy past years by lustrums; if thou art at a time of life, past thirty we will say, hast thou not found that thy years, which are now short enough, were long in those bygone days?

Those fourteen months were to her the space almost of a second life, as she now looked back upon them. When those earlier vows were made, what had she cared for prudence, for the world's esteem, or an alliance that might be becoming to her? That Owen Fitzgerald was a gentleman of high blood and ancient family, so much she had cared to know; for the rest, she had only cared to feel this, that her heart beat high with pleasure when he was with her.

Did her heart beat as high now, when his cousin was beside her? No; she felt that it did not. And sometimes she felt, or feared to feel, that it might beat high again when she should again see the lover whom her judgment had rejected.

Her judgment had rejected him altogether long before an idea had at all presented itself to her that Herbert Fitzgerald could become her suitor. Nor had this been done wholly in obedience to her mother's mandate. She had realized in her

own mind the conviction that Owen Fitzgerald was not a man with whom any girl could at present safely link her fortune. She knew well that he was idle, dissipated, and extravagant; and she could not believe that these vices had arisen only from his banishment from her, and that they would cease and vanish whenever that banishment might cease.

Messages came to her, in underhand ways—ways well understood in Ireland, and not always ignored in England—to the effect that all his misdoings arose from his unhappiness; that he drank and gambled only because the gates of Desmond Court were no longer open to him. There was that in Clara's heart which did for a while predispose her to believe somewhat of this, to hope that it might not be altogether false. Could any girl loving such a man not have had some such hope? But then the stories of these revelries became worse and worse, and it was dinned into her ears that these doings had been running on in all their enormity before that day of his banishment. And so, silently and sadly, with no outspoken word either to mother or brother, she had resolved to give him up.

There was no necessity to her for any outspoken word. She had promised her mother to hold no intercourse with the man; and she had kept and would keep her promise. Why say

more about it? How she might have reconciled her promise to her mother with an enduring engagement, had Owen Fitzgerald's conduct allowed her to regard her engagement as enduring,—that had been a sore trouble to her while hope had remained; but now no hope remained, and that trouble was over.

And then Herbert Fitzgerald had come across her path, and those sweet, loving, kind Fitzgerald girls, who were always ready to cover her with such sweet caresses, with whom she had known more of the happiness of friendliness than ever she had felt before. They threw themselves upon her like sisters, and she had never before enjoyed sisterly treatment. He had come across her path; and from the first moment she had become conscious of his admiration.

She knew herself to be penniless, and dreaded that she should be looked upon as wishing to catch the rich heir. But every one had conspired to throw them together. Lady Fitzgerald had welcomed her like a mother, with more caressing soft tenderness than her own mother usually vouchsafed to her; and even Sir Thomas had gone out of his usual way to be kind to her.

That her mother would approve of such a marriage she could not doubt. Lady Desmond in these latter days had not said much to her about Owen; but she had said very much of the

horrors of poverty. And she had been too subtle to praise the virtues of Herbert with open plain words; but she had praised the comforts of a handsome income and well-established family mansion. Clara at these times had understood more than had been intended, and had, therefore, put herself on her guard against her mother's worldly wisdom; but, nevertheless, the dropping of the water had in some little measure hollowed the stone beneath.

And thus, thinking of these things, she stood at the window for some half-hour after the form of her accepted lover had become invisible in the gathering gloom of the evening.

And then her mother entered the room, and candles were brought. Lady Desmond was all smiles and benignity, as she had been for this last week past, while Herbert Fitzgerald had been coming and going almost daily at Desmond Court. But Clara understood this benignity, and disliked it.

It was, however, now necessary that everything should be told. Herbert had declared that he should at once inform his father and mother, and obtain their permission for his marriage. He spoke of it as a matter on which there was no occasion for any doubt or misgiving. He was an only son, he said, and trusted and loved in everything. His father never opposed him on

any subject whatever; and would, he was sure, consent to any match he might propose. 'But as to you,' he added, with a lover's flattering fervour, 'they are all so fond of you, they all think so much of you, that my only fear is that I shall be jealous. They'll all make love to you, Aunt Letty included.'

It was therefore essential that she should at once tell her mother, and ask her mother's leave. She had once before confessed a tale of love, and had done so with palpitation of the heart, with trembling of the limbs, and floods of tears. Then her tale had been received with harsh sternness. Now she could tell her story without any trembling, with no tears; but it was almost indifferent to her whether her mother was harsh or tender.

'What! has Mr. Fitzgerald gone?' said the countess, on entering the room.

'Yes, mamma; this half-hour,' said Clara, not as yet coming away from the window.

'I did not hear his horse, and imagined he was here still. I hope he has not thought me terribly uncivil, but I could not well leave what I was doing.'

To this little make-believe speech Clara did not think it necessary to return any answer. She was thinking how she would begin to say that for saying which there was so strong a necessity, and she could not take a part in small false

badinage on a subject which was so near her heart.

'And what about that stupid mason at Clady?' asked the countess, still making believe.

'Mr. Fitzgerald was there again to-day, mamma; and I think it will be all right now; but he did not say much about it.'

'Why not? you were all so full of it yesterday.'

Clara, who had half turned round towards the light, now again turned herself towards the window. This task must be done; but the doing of it was so disagreeable! How was she to tell her mother that she loved this man, seeing that so short a time since she had declared that she loved another?

'And what was he talking about, love?' said the countess, ever so graciously. 'Or, perhaps, no questioning on the matter can be allowed. May I ask questions, or may I not? eh, Clara?' and then the mother, walking up towards the window, put her fair white hands upon her daughter's two shoulders.

'Of course you may inquire,' said Clara.

'Then I do inquire—immediately. What has this *preux chevalier* been saying to my Clara, that makes her stand thus solemn and silent, gazing out into the dark night?'

'Mamma!'

'Well, love?'

'Herbert Fitzgerald has—has asked me to be his wife. He has proposed to me.'

The mother's arm now encircled the daughter lovingly, and the mother's lips were pressed to the daughter's forehead. 'Herbert Fitzgerald has asked you to be his wife, has he? And what answer has my bonny bird deigned to make to so audacious a request?'

Lady Desmond had never before spoken to her daughter in tones so gracious, in a manner so flattering, so caressing, so affectionate. But Clara would not open her heart to her mother's tenderness. She could not look into her mother's face, and welcome her mother's consent with unutterable joy, as she would have done had that consent been given a year since to a less prudent proposition. That marriage for which she was now to ask her mother's sanction would of course be sanctioned. She had no favour to beg; nothing for which to be grateful. With a slight motion, unconsciously, unwillingly, but not the less positively, she repulsed her mother's caress as she answered her question.

'I have accepted him, mamma; that is, of course, if you do not object.'

'My own, own, child!' said the countess, seizing her daughter in her arms, and pressing her to her bosom. And in truth Clara was,

now probably for the first time, her own heart's daughter. Her son, though he was but a poor earl, was Earl of Desmond. He too, though in truth but a poor earl, was not absolutely destitute, —would in truth be blessed with a fair future. But Lady Clara had hitherto been felt only as a weight. She had been born poor as poverty itself, and hitherto had shown so little disposition to find for herself a remedy for this crushing evil! But now — now matters were indeed changed. She had obtained for herself the best match in the whole country round, and, in doing so, had sacrificed her heart's young love. Was she not entitled to all a mother's tenderness? Who knew, who could know the miseries of poverty so well as the Countess of Desmond? Who then could feel so much gratitude to a child for prudently escaping from them? Lady Desmond did feel grateful to her daughter.

'My own, own child; my happy girl,' she repeated. 'He is a man to whom any mother in all the land would be proud to see her daughter married. Never, never did I see a young man so perfectly worthy of a girl's love. He is so thoroughly well educated, so thoroughly well conducted, so good-looking, so warm-hearted, so advantageously situated in all his circumstances. Of course he will go into Parliament, and then any course is open to him. The property is, I

believe, wholly unembarrassed, and there are no younger brothers. You may say that the place is his own already, for old Sir Thomas is almost nobody. I do wish you joy, my own dearest, dearest Clara!' After which burst of maternal eloquence, the countess pressed her lips to those of her child, and gave her a mother's warmest kiss.

Clara was conscious that she was thoroughly dissatisfied with her mother, but she could not exactly say why it was so. She did return her mother's kiss, but she did it coldly, and with lips that were not eager.

'I'm glad you think that I have done right, mamma.'

'Right, my love! Of course I think that you have done right: only I give you no credit, dearest; none in the least; for how could you help loving one so lovable in every way as dear Herbert?'

'Credit! no, there is no credit,' she said, not choosing to share her mother's pleasantry.

'But there is this credit. Had you not been one of the sweetest girls that ever was born, he would not have loved you.'

'He has loved me because there was no one else here,' said Clara.

'Nonsense! No one else here, indeed! Has he not the power if he pleases to go and

choose whomever he will in all London. Had he been mercenary, and wanted money,' said the countess, in a tone which showed how thoroughly she despised any such vice, 'he might have had what he would. But then he could not have had my Clara. But he has looked for beauty and manners and high-bred tastes, and an affectionate heart; and, in my opinion, he could not have been more successful in his search.' After which second burst of eloquence, she again kissed her daughter.

'Twas thus, at that moment, that she congratulated the wife of the future Sir Herbert Fitzgerald; and then she allowed Clara to go up to her own room, there to meditate quietly on what she had done, and on that which she was about to do. But late in the evening, Lady Desmond, whose mind was thoroughly full of the subject, again broke out into triumph.

'You must write to Patrick to-morrow, Clara. He must hear the good news from no one but yourself.'

'Had we not better wait a little, mamma?'

'Why, my love? You hardly know how anxious your brother is for your welfare.'

'I knew it was right to tell you, mamma——'

'Right to tell me! of course it was. You could not have had the heart to keep it from me for half a day.'

'But perhaps it may be better not to mention it further till we know——'

'Till we know what?' said the countess with a look of fear about her brow.

'Whether Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald will wish it. If they object——'

'Object! why should they object? how can they object? They are not mercenary people; and you are an earl's daughter. And Herbert is not like a girl. The property is his own, entailed on him, and he may do as he pleases.'

'In such a matter I am sure he would not wish to displease either his father or his mother.'

'Nonsense, my dear; quite nonsense; you do not at all see the difference between a young man and a girl. He has a right to do exactly as he likes in such a matter. But I am quite sure that they will not object. Why should they? How can they?'

'Mr. Fitzgerald says that they will not,' Clara admitted, almost grudgingly.

'Of course they will not. I don't suppose they could bring themselves to object to anything he might suggest. I never knew a young man so happily situated in this respect. He is quite a free agent. I don't think they would say much to him if he insisted on marrying the cook-maid. Indeed, it seems to me that his word is quite paramount at Castle Richmond.'

'All the same, mamma, I would rather not write to Patrick till something more has been settled.'

'You are wrong there, Clara. If anything disagreeable should happen, which is quite impossible, it would be absolutely necessary that your brother should know. Believe me, my love, I only advise you for your own good.'

'But Mr. Fitzgerald will probably be here to-morrow; or if not to-morrow, next day.'

'I have no doubt he will, love. But why do you call him Mr. Fitzgerald? You were calling him Herbert the other day. Don't you remember how I scolded you? I should not scold you now.'

Clara made no answer to this, and then the subject was allowed to rest for that night. She would call him Herbert, she said to herself; but not to her mother. She would keep the use of that name till she could talk with Emmeline as a sister. Of all her anticipated pleasures, that of having now a real sister was perhaps the greatest; or, rather, that of being able to talk about Herbert with one whom she could love and treat as a sister. But Herbert himself would exact the use of his own Christian name, for the delight of his own ears; that was a matter of course; that, doubtless, had been already done.

And then mother and daughter went to bed. The countess, as she did so, was certainly happy

to her heart's core. Could it be that she had some hope, unrecognized by herself, that Owen Fitzgerald might now once more be welcomed at Desmond Court? that something might now be done to rescue him from that slough of despond?

And Clara too was happy, though her happiness was mixed. She did love Herbert Fitzgerald. She was sure of that. She said so to herself over and over again. Love him! of course she loved him, and would cherish him as her lord and husband to the last day of her life, the last gasp of her breath.

But still, as sleep came upon her eyelids, she saw in her memory the bright flash of that other lover's countenance, when he first astonished her with the avowal of his love, as he walked beside her under the elms, with his horse following at his heels.

CHAPTER XII.

DOUBTS.

I BELIEVE there is no period of life so happy as that in which a thriving lover leaves his mistress after his first success. His joy is more perfect then than at the absolute moment of his own eager vow, and her half-assenting blushes. Then he is thinking mostly of her, and is to a certain degree embarrassed by the effort necessary for success. But when the promise has once been given to him, and he is able to escape into the domain of his own heart, he is as a conqueror who has mastered half a continent by his own strategy.

It never occurs to him, he hardly believes, that his success is no more than that which is the ordinary lot of mortal man. He never reflects that all the old married fogies whom he knows and despises, have just as much ground for pride, if such pride were enduring; that every fat, silent, dull, somnolent old lady whom he sees

and quizzes, has at some period been deemed as worthy a prize as his priceless galleon; and so deemed by as bold a captor as himself.

Some one has said that every young mother, when her first child is born, regards the babe as the most wonderful production of that description which the world has yet seen. And this too is true. But I doubt even whether that conviction is so strong as the conviction of the young successful lover, that he has achieved a triumph which should ennoble him down to late generations. As he goes along he has a contempt for other men; for they know nothing of such glory as his. As he pores over his 'Blackstone,' he remembers that he does so, not so much that he may acquire law, as that he may acquire Fanny; and then all other porers over 'Blackstone' are low and mean in his sight—are mercenary in their views and unfortunate in their ideas, for they have no Fanny in view.

Herbert Fitzgerald had this proud feeling strong within his heart as he gallòped away across the greensward, and trotted fast along the road, home to Castle Richmond. She was compounded of all excellences—so he swore to himself over and over again—and being so compounded, she had consented to bestow all these excellences upon him. Being herself goddess-like, she had promised to take him as the object

of her world's worship. So he trotted on fast and faster, as though conscious of the half-continent which he had won by his skill and valour.

She had told him about his cousin Owen. Indeed, the greater number of the soft musical words which she had spoken in that long three hours' colloquy had been spoken on this special point. It had behoved her to tell him all; and she thought that she had done so. Nay, she had done so with absolute truth—to the best of her heart's power.

'You were so young then,' he had argued; 'so very young.'

'Yes, very young. I am not very old now, you know,' and she smiled sweetly on him.

'No, no; but a year makes so much difference. You were all but a child then. You do not love him now, Clara?'

'No; I do not love him now,' she had answered.

And then he exacted a second, a third, a fourth assurance, that she did absolutely, actually, and with her whole heart love him, him Herbert, in lieu of that other him, poor Owen; and with this he, Herbert, was contented. Content; nay, but proud, elated with triumph, and conscious of victory. In this spirit he rode home as fast as his horse could carry him.

He too had to tell his tale to those to whom he

owed obedience, and to beg that they would look upon his intended bride with eyes of love and with parental affection. But in this respect he was hardly troubled with more doubt than Clara had felt. How could any one object to his Clara?

There are young men who, from their positions in life, are obliged to abstain from early marriage, or to look for dowries with their wives. But he, luckily, was not fettered in this way. He could marry as he pleased, so long as she whom he might choose brought with her gentle blood, a good heart, a sweet temper, and such attraction of person and manners as might make the establishment at Castle Richmond proud of his young bride. And of whom could that establishment be more proud than of Lady Clara Desmond? So he rode home without any doubt to clog his happiness.

But he had a source of joy which Clara wanted. She was almost indifferent to her mother's satisfaction; but Herbert looked forward with the liveliest, keenest anticipation to his mother's gratified caresses and unqualified approval—to his father's kind smile and warm assurance of consent. Clara had made herself known at Castle Richmond; and he had no doubt but that all this would be added to his cup of happiness. There was therefore no alloy to debase his virgin gold as he trotted quickly into the stable-yard.

But he resolved that he would say nothing about the matter that night. He could not well tell them all in full conclave together. Early after breakfast he would go to his father's room; and after that, he would find his mother. There would then be no doubt that the news would duly leak out among his sisters and Aunt Letty.

'Again only just barely in time, Herbert,' said Mary, as they clustered round the fire before dinner.

'You can't say I ever keep you waiting; and I really think that's some praise for a man who has got a good many things on his hand.'

'So it is, Herbert,' said Emmeline. 'But we have done something too. We have been over to Berryhill; and the people have already begun there: they were at work with their pickaxes among the rocks by the river-side.'

'So much the better. Was Mr. Somers there?'

'We did not see him; but he had been there,' said Aunt Letty. 'But Mrs. Townsend found us. And who do you think came up to us in the most courteous, affable, condescending way?'

'Who? I don't know. Brady, the builder, I suppose.'

'No, indeed: Brady was not half so civil, for he kept himself to his own work. It was the Rev. Mr. M'Carthy, if you please.'

'I only hope you were civil to him,' said

Herbert, with some slight suffusion of colour over his face; for he rather doubted the conduct of his aunt to the priest, especially as her great Protestant ally, Mrs. Townsend, was of the party.

'Civil! I don't know what you would have, unless you wanted me to embrace him. He shook hands with us all round. I really thought Mrs. Townsend would have looked him into the river when he came to her.'

'She always was the quintessence of absurdity and prejudice,' said he.

'Oh, Herbert!' exclaimed Aunt Letty.

'Well; and what of "Oh, Herbert?" I say she is so. If you and Mary and Emmeline did not look him into the river when he shook hands with you, why should she do so? He is an ordained priest even according to her own tenets, —only she knows nothing of what her own tenets are.'

'I'll tell you what they are. They are the substantial, true, and holy doctrines of the Protestant religion, founded on the gospel. Mrs. Townsend is a thoroughly Protestant woman; one who cannot abide the sorceries of popery.'

'Hates them as a mad dog hates water; and with the same amount of judgment. We none of us wish to be drowned; but nevertheless there are some good qualities in water.'

'But there are no good qualities in popery,' said Aunt Letty, with her most extreme energy.

'Are there not?' said Herbert. 'I should have thought that belief in Christ, belief in the Bible, belief in the doctrine of a Saviour's atonement, were good qualities. Even the Mahommedan's religion has some qualities that are good.'

'I would sooner be a Mahommedan than a Papist,' said Aunt Letty, somewhat thoughtlessly, but very stoutly.

'You would alter your opinion after the first week in a harem,' said Herbert. And then there was a burst of laughter, in which Aunt Letty herself joined. 'I would sooner go there than go to confession,' she whispered to Mary, as they all walked off to dinner.

'And how is the Lady Clara's arm?' asked Mary, as soon as they were again once more round the fire.

'The Lady Clara's arm is still very blue,' said Herbert.

'And I suppose it took you half an hour to weep over it?' continued his sister.

'Exactly, by Shrewsbury clock.'

'And while you were weeping over the arm, what happened to the hand? She did not surrender it, did she, in return for so much tenderness on your part?'

Emmeline thought that Mary was very pertinacious in her badinage, and was going to bid her hold her tongue; but she observed that Herbert blushed, and walked away without further answer. He went to the further end of the long room, and there threw himself on to a sofa. 'Could it be that it was all settled?' thought Emmeline to herself.

She followed him to the sofa, and sitting beside him, took hold of his arm. 'Oh, Herbert! if there is anything to tell, do tell me.'

'Anything to tell!' said he. 'What do you mean?'

'Oh! you know. I do love her so dearly. I shall never be contented to love any one else as your wife—not to love her really, really with all my heart.'

'What geese you girls are!—you are always thinking of love, and weddings, and orange-blossoms.'

'It is only for you I think about them,' said Emmeline. 'I know there is something to tell. Dear Herbert, do tell me.'

'There is a young bachelor duke coming here to-morrow. He has a million a year, and three counties all his own; he has blue eyes, and is the handsomest man that ever was seen. Is that news enough?'

'Very well, Herbert. I would tell you anything.'

'Well; tell me anything.'

'I'll tell you this. I know you're in love with Clara Desmond, and I'm sure she's in love with you; and I believe you are both engaged, and you're not nice at all to have a secret from me. I never tease you, as Mary does, and it would make me so happy to know it.'

Upon this he put his arm round her waist and whispered one word into her ear. She gave an exclamation of delight; and as the tears came into her eyes congratulated him with a kiss. 'Oh dear, oh dear! I am so happy!' she exclaimed.

'Hush—sh,' he whispered. 'I knew how it would be if I told you.'

'But they will all know to-morrow, will they not?'

'Leave that to me. You have coaxed me out of my secret, and you are bound to keep it.' And then he went away well pleased. This description of delight on his sister's part was the first instalment of that joy which he had promised himself from the satisfaction of his family.

Lady Fitzgerald had watched all that had passed, and had already learned her mistake—her mistake in that she had prophesied that no immediate proposal was likely to be made by her son. She now knew well enough that he had made such a proposal, and that he had been accepted.

And this greatly grieved her. She had felt certain from the few slight words which Sir Thomas had spoken that there were valid reasons why her son should not marry a penniless girl. That conversation, joined to other things, to the man's visit, and her husband's deep dejection, had convinced her that all was not right. Some misfortune was impending over them, and there had been that in her own early history which filled her with dismay as she thought of this.

She had ardently desired to caution her son in this respect,—to guard him, if possible, against future disappointment and future sorrow. But she could not do so without obtaining in some sort her husband's assent to her doing so. She resolved that she would talk it over with Sir Thomas. But the subject was one so full of pain, and he was so ill, and therefore she had put it off.

And now she saw that the injury was done. Nevertheless, she said nothing either to Emmeline or to Herbert. If the injury were done, what good could now result from talking? She doubtless would hear it all soon enough. So she sat still, watching them.

On the following morning Sir Thomas did not come out to breakfast. Herbert went into his room quite early, as was always his custom; and as he left it for the breakfast-parlour he said,

'Father, I should like to speak to you just now about something of importance.'

'Something of importance, Herbert; what is it? Anything wrong?' For Sir Thomas was nervous, and easily frightened.

'Oh dear, no; nothing is wrong. It is nothing that will annoy you; at least I think not. But it will keep till after breakfast. I will come in again the moment breakfast is over.' And so saying he left the room with a light step.

In the breakfast-parlour it seemed to him as though everybody was conscious of some important fact. His mother's kiss was peculiarly solemn and full of solicitude; Aunt Letty smirked as though she was aware of something—something over and above the great Protestant tenets which usually supported her; and Mary had no joke to fling at him.

'Emmeline,' he whispered, 'you have told.'

'No, indeed,' she replied. But what mattered it? Everybody would know now in a few minutes. So he ate his breakfast, and then returned to Sir Thomas.

'Father,' said he, as soon as he had got into the arm-chair, in which it was his custom to sit when talking with Sir Thomas, 'I hope what I am going to tell you will give you pleasure. I have proposed to a young lady, and she has—accepted me.'

'You have proposed, and have been accepted!'

'Yes, father.'

'And the young lady——?'

'Is Lady Clara Desmond. I hope you will say that you approve of it. She has no fortune, as we all know, but that will hardly matter to me; and I think you will allow that in every other respect she is——'

Perfect, Herbert would have said, had he dared to express his true meaning. But he paused for a moment to look for a less triumphant word; and then paused again, and left his sentence incomplete, when he saw the expression of his father's face.

'Oh, father! you do not mean to say that you do not like her?'

But it was not dislike that was expressed in his father's face, as Herbert felt the moment after he had spoken. There was pain there, and solicitude, and disappointment; a look of sorrow at the tidings thus conveyed to him; but nothing that seemed to betoken dislike of any person.

'What is it, sir? Why do you not speak to me? Can it be that you disapprove of my marrying?'

Sir Thomas certainly did disapprove of his son's marrying, but he lacked the courage to say so. Much misery that had hitherto come upon him, and that was about to come on all those

whom he loved so well, arose from this lack of courage. He did not dare to tell his son that he advised him for the present to put aside all such hopes. It would have been terrible for him to do so; but he knew that in not doing so he was occasioning sorrow that would be more terrible.

And yet he did not do it. Herbert saw clearly that the project was distasteful to his father,—that project which he had hoped to have seen received with so much delight; but nothing was said to him which tended to make him alter his purpose.

'Do you not like her?' he asked his father, almost piteously.

'Yes, yes; I do like her, we all like her, very much indeed, Herbert.'

'Then why——'

'You are so young, my boy, and she is so very young, and——'

'And what?'

'Why, Herbert, it is not always practicable for the son even of a man of property to marry so early in life as this. She has nothing you know.'

'No,' said the young man, proudly; 'I never thought of looking for money.'

'But in your position it is so essential if a young man wishes to marry.'

Herbert had always regarded his father as the most liberal man breathing,—as open-hearted and open-handed almost to a fault. To him, his only

son, he had ever been so, refusing him nothing, and latterly allowing him to do almost as he would with the management of the estate. He could not understand that this liberality should be turned to parsimony on such an occasion as that of his son's marriage.

'You think then, sir, that I ought not to marry Lady Clara?' said Herbert very bitterly.

'I like her excessively,' said Sir Thomas. 'I think she is a sweet girl, a very sweet girl, all that I or your mother could desire to see in your wife; but——'

'But she is not rich.'

'Do not speak to me in that tone, my boy,' said Sir Thomas, with an expression that would have moved his enemy to pity, let alone his son. His son did pity him, and ceased to wear the angry expression of face which had so wounded his father.

'But, father, I do not understand you,' he said. 'Is there any real objection why I should not marry? I am more than twenty-two, and you, I think, married earlier than that.'

In answer to this Sir Thomas only sighed meekly and piteously.

'If you mean to say,' continued the son, 'that it will be inconvenient to you to make me any allowance——'

'No, no, no; you are of course entitled to

what you want, and as long as I can give it, you shall have it.'

'As long as you can give it, father!'

'As long as it is in my power, I mean. What can I want of anything but for you—for you and them?'

After this Herbert sat silent for a while, leaning on his arm. He knew that there existed some mischief, but he could not fathom it. Had he been prudent, he would have felt that there was some impediment to his love; some evil which it behoved him to fathom before he allowed his love to share it; but when was a lover prudent?

'We should live here, should we not, father? No second establishment would be necessary.'

'Of course you would live here,' said Sir Thomas, glad to be able to look at the subject on any side that was not painful. 'Of course you would live here. For the matter of that, Herbert, the house should be considered as your own if you so wished it.'

Against this the son put in his most violent protest. Nothing on earth should make him consider himself master of Castle Richmond as long as his father lived. Nor would Clara,—his Clara, wish it. He knew her well, he boasted. It would amply suffice to her to live there with them all. Was not the house large enough?

And, indeed, where else could he live, seeing that all his interests were naturally centred upon the property?

And then Sir Thomas did give his consent. It would be wrong to say that it was wrung from him. He gave it willingly enough, as far as the present moment was concerned. When it was once settled, he assured his son that he would love Clara as his daughter. But, nevertheless——

The father knew that he had done wrong; and Herbert knew that he also, he himself, had done wrongly. He was aware that there was something which he did not understand. But he had promised to see Clara either that day or the next, and he could not bring himself to unsay all that he had said to her. He left his father's room sorrowful at heart, and discontented. He had expected that his tidings would have been received in so far other a manner; that he would have been able to go from his father's study up stairs to his mother's room with so exulting a step; that his news, when once the matter was ratified by his father's approval, would have flown about the house with so loud a note of triumph. And now it was so different! His father had consented; but it was too plain that there was no room for any triumph.

'Well Herbert!' said Emmeline, jumping up to meet him as he returned to a small back

drawing-room, through which he had gone to his father's dressing-room. She had calculated that he would come there, and that she might thus get the first word from him after the interview was over.

But there was a frown upon his brow, and displeasure in his eyes. There was none of that bright smile of gratified pride with which she had expected that her greeting would have been met. 'Is there anything wrong?' she said. 'He does not disapprove, does he?'

'Never mind; and do leave me now. I never can make you understand that one is not always in a humour for joking.' And so saying, he put her aside, and passed on.

Joking! That was indeed hard upon poor Emmeline, seeing that her thoughts were so full of him, that her heart beat so warmly for his promised bride. But she said nothing, shrinking back abashed, and vanishing out of the way. Could it be possible that her father should have refused to receive Lady Clara Desmond as his daughter-in-law?

He then betook himself to a private territory of his own, where he might be sure that he would remain undisturbed for some half-hour or so. He would go to his mother, of course, but not quite immediately. He would think over the matter, endeavouring to ascertain what it

was that had made his father's manner and words so painful to him.

But he could not get his thoughts to work rightly;—which getting of the thoughts to work rightly is, by-the-by, as I take it, the hardest work which a man is called upon to do. Not that the subject to be thought about need in itself be difficult. Were one to say that thoughts about hydrostatics and pneumatics are difficult to the multitude, or that mental efforts in regions of political economy or ethical philosophy are beyond ordinary reach, one would only pronounce an evident truism, an absurd platitude. But let any man take any subject fully within his own mind's scope, and strive to think about it steadily, with some attempt at calculation as to results. The chances are his mind will fly off, will-he-nill-he, to some utterly different matter. When he wishes to debate within himself that question of his wife's temper, he will find himself considering whether he may not judiciously give away half a dozen pairs of those old boots; or when it behoves him to decide whether it shall be manure and a green crop, or a fallow season and then grass seeds, he cannot keep himself from inward inquiry as to the meaning of that peculiar smile on Mrs. Walker's face when he shook hands with her last night.

Lord Brougham and Professor Faraday can, no doubt, command their thoughts. If many men could do so, there would be many Lord Broughams and many Professor Faradays.

At the present moment Herbert Fitzgerald had no right to consider himself as following in the steps of either one or other of these great men. He wished to think about his father's circumstances, but his mind would fly off to Clara Desmond and her perfections. And thus, though he remained there for half an hour, with his back to the fire and his hands in his pockets, his deliberations had done him no good whatever,—had rather done him harm, seeing that he had only warmed himself into a firmer determination to go on with what he was doing. And then he went to his mother.

She kissed him, and spoke very tenderly, nay affectionately, about Clara; but even she, even his mother, did not speak joyously; and she also said something about the difficulty of providing a maintenance for a married son. Then to her he burst forth, and spoke somewhat loudly.

'I cannot understand all this, mother. If either you or my father know any reason why I should be treated differently from other sons, you ought to tell me; not leave me to grope about in the dark.'

'But, my boy, we both think that no son was

ever entitled to more consideration, or to kinder or more liberal treatment.'

'Why do I hear all this, then, about the difficulty of my marrying? Or if I hear so much, why do I not hear more? I know pretty well, I believe, what is my father's income.'

'If you do not, he would tell you for the asking.'

'And I know that I must be the heir to it, whatever it is,—not that that feeling would make any difference in my dealings with him, not the least. And, under these circumstances, I cannot conceive why he and you should look coldly upon my marriage.'

'I look coldly on it, Herbert!'

'Do you not? Do you not tell me that there will be no income for me? If that is to be so; if that really is the case; if the property has so dwindled away, or become embarrassed——'

'Oh, Herbert! there never was a man less likely to injure his son's property than your father.'

'I do not mean that, mother. Let him do what he likes with it, I should not upbraid him, even in my thoughts. But if it be embarrassed; if it has dwindled away; if there be any reason why I should not regard myself as altogether untrammelled with regard to money, he ought to tell me. I cannot accuse myself of expensive tastes.'

'Dearest Herbert, nobody accuses you of anything.'

'But I do desire to marry; and now I have engaged myself, and will not break from my engagement, unless it be shown to me that I am bound in honour to do so. Then, indeed——'

'Oh, Herbert! I do not know what you mean.'

'I mean this: that I expect that Clara shall be received as my wife with open arms——'

'And so she shall be if she comes.'

'Or else that some reason should be given me why she should not come. As to income, something must be done, I suppose. If the means at our disposal are less than I have been taught to believe, I at any rate will not complain. But they cannot, I think, be so small as to afford any just reason why I should not marry.'

'Your father, you see, is ill, and one can hardly talk to him fully upon such matters at present.'

'Then I will speak to Somers. He, at any rate, must know how the property is circumstanced, and I suppose he will not hesitate to tell me.'

'I don't think Somers can tell you anything.'

'Then what is it? As for the London estate, mother, that is all moonshine. What if it were

gone altogether? It may be that it is that which vexes my father; but if so, it is a monomania.'

'Oh, my boy, do not use such a word!'

'You know what I mean. If any doubt as to that is creating this despondency, it only shows that though we are bound to respect and relieve my father's state of mind, we are not at all bound to share it. What would it really matter, mother, if that place in London were washed away by the Thames? There is more than enough left for us all, unless——'

'Ah, Herbert, that is it.'

'Then I will go to Somers, and he shall tell me. My father's interest in this property cannot have been involved without his knowledge; and circumstanced as we and my father are, he is bound to tell me.'

'If there be anything within his knowledge to tell, he will tell it.'

'And if there be nothing within his knowledge, then I can only look upon all this as a disease on my poor father's part. I will do all I can to comfort him in it; but it would be madness to destroy my whole happiness because he labours under delusions.'

Lady Fitzgerald did not know what further to say. She half believed that Sir Thomas did labour under some delusion; but then she half

believed also that he had upon his mind a sorrow, terribly real, which was in no sort delusive. Under such circumstances, how could she advise her son? Instead of advising him, she caressed him.

'But I may claim this from you, mother, that if Somers tells me nothing which ought to make me break my word to Clara, you will receive her as your daughter. You will promise me that, will you not?'

Lady Fitzgerald did promise, warmly; assuring him that she already dearly loved Clara Desmond, that she would delight in having such a daughter-in-law, and that she would go to her to welcome her as such as soon as ever he should bid her do so. With this Herbert was somewhat comforted, and immediately started on his search after Mr. Somers.

I do not think that any person is to be found, as a rule, attached to English estates whose position is analogous to that of an Irish agent. And there is a wide misunderstanding in England as to these Irish functionaries. I have attempted, some pages back, to describe the national delinquencies of a middleman, or profit-renter. In England we are apt to think that the agents on Irish properties are to be charged with similar shortcomings. This I can assert to be a great mistake; and I believe that, as a class, the agents

on Irish properties do their duty in a manner beneficial to the people.

That there are, or were, many agents who were also middlemen, or profit-renters, and that in this second position they were a nuisance to the country, is no doubt true. But they were no nuisance in their working capacity as agents. That there are some bad agents there can be no doubt, as there are also some bad shoemakers.

The duties towards an estate which an agent performs in Ireland are, I believe, generally shared in England between three or four different persons. The family lawyer performs part, the estate steward performs part, and the landlord himself performs part;—as to small estates, by far the greater part.

In Ireland, let the estate be ever so small—eight hundred a year we will say—all the working of the property is managed by the agent. It is he who knows the tenants, and the limits of their holdings; it is he who arranges leases, and allows—or much more generally does not allow—for improvements. He takes the rent, and gives the order for the ejection of tenants if he cannot get it.

I am far from saying that it would not be well that much of this should be done by the landlord himself;—that all of it should be so done on a

small property. But it is done by agents; and, as a rule is, I think, done honestly.

Mr. Somers was agent to the Castle Richmond property, and as he took to himself as such five per cent. on all rents paid, and as he was agent also to sundry other small properties in the neighbourhood, he succeeded in making a very snug income. He had also an excellent house on the estate, and was altogether very much thought of; on the whole, perhaps, more than was Sir Thomas. But in this respect it was probable that Herbert might soon take the lead.

He was a large, heavy, consequential man, always very busy, as though aware of being one of the most important wheels that kept the Irish clock agoing; but he was honest, kind-hearted in the main, true as steel to his employers, and good-humoured—as long as he was allowed to have his own way. In these latter days he had been a little soured by Herbert's interference, and had even gone so far as to say that, 'in his humble judgment, Mr. Fitzgerald was wrong in doing'—so and so. But he generally called him Herbert, was always kind to him, and in his heart of hearts loved him dearly. But that was a matter of course, for had he not been agent to the estate before Herbert was born?

Immediately after his interview with his mother, Mr. Herbert rode over to Mr. Somers's

house, and there found him sitting alone in his office. He dashed immediately into the subject that had brought him there. 'I have come, Mr. Somers,' said he, 'to ask you a question about the property.'

'About the Castle Richmond property?' said Mr. Somers, rather surprised by his visitor's manner.

'Yes; you know in what a state my poor father now is.'

'I know that Sir Thomas is not very well. I am sorry to say that it is long since he has been quite himself.'

'There is something that is preying upon his spirits.'

'I am afraid so, Herbert.'

'Then tell me fairly, Mr. Somers, do you know what it is?'

'Not—in—the least. I have no conception whatever, and never have had any. I know no cause for trouble that should disquiet him.'

'There is nothing wrong about the property?'

'Not to my knowledge.'

'Who has the title-deeds?'

'They are at Coutts's.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Well; as sure as a man can be of a thing that he does not see. I have never seen them there; indeed, have never seen them at all; but I feel

no doubt in my own mind as to their being at the bankers.'

'Is there much due on the estate?'

'Very little. No estate in county Cork has less on it. Miss Letty has her income, and when Poulnasherry was bought,—that townland lying just under Berryhill, where the gorse cover is, part of the purchase money was left on mortgage. That is still due; but the interest is less than a hundred a year.'

'And that is all?'

'All that I know of.'

'Could there be encumbrances without your knowing it?'

'I think not. I think it is impossible. Of all men your father is the last to encumber his estates in a manner unknown to his agent, and to pay off the interest in secret.'

'What is it then, Mr. Somers?'

'I do not know.' And then Mr. Somers paused. 'Of course you have heard of a visit he received the other day from a stranger?'

'Yes; I heard of it.'

'People about here are talking of it. And he —that man, with a younger man—they are still living in Cork, at a little drinking-house in South Main Street. The younger man has been seen down here twice.'

'But what can that mean?'

'I do not know. I tell you everything that I do know.'

Herbert exacted a promise from him that he would continue to tell him everything which he might learn, and then rode back to Castle Richmond.

'The whole thing must be a delusion,' he said to himself; and resolved that there was no valid reason why he should make Clara unhappy by any reference to the circumstance.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. MOLLETT RETURNS TO SOUTH MAIN STREET.

I MUST now take my readers back to that very unsavoury public-house in South Main Street, Cork, in which, for the present, lived Mr. Matthew Mollett and his son Abraham.

I need hardly explain to a discerning public that Mr. Matthew Mollett was the gentleman who made that momentous call at Castle Richmond, and flurried all that household.

'Drat it!' said Mrs. Jones to herself on that day, as soon as she had regained the solitude of her own private apartment, after having taken a long look at Mr. Mollett in the hall. On that occasion she sat down on a low chair in the middle of the room, put her two hands down substantially on her two knees, gave a long sigh, and then made the above exclamation,—'Drat it!'

Mrs. Jones was still thoroughly a Saxon, although she had lived for so many years among the Celts. But it was only when she was quite

alone that she allowed herself the indulgence of so peculiarly Saxon a mode of expressing either her surprise or indignation.

'It's the same man,' she said to herself, 'as come that day, as sure as eggs;' and then for five minutes she maintained her position, cogitating. 'And he's like the other fellow too,' she continued. 'Only, somehow he's not like him.' And then another pause. 'And yet he is; only it can't be; and he ain't just so tall, and he's older like.' And then, still meditating, Mrs. Jones kept her position for full ten minutes longer; at the end of which time she got up and shook herself. She deserved to be bracketed with Lord Brougham and Professor Faraday, for she had kept her mind intent on her subject, and had come to a resolution. 'I won't say nothing to nobody, noways,' was the expression of her mind's purpose. 'Only I'll tell missus as how he was the man as come to Wales.' And she did tell so much to her mistress—as we have before learned.

Mr. Mollett had gone down from Cork to Castle Richmond in one of those delightful Irish vehicles called a covered car. An inside-covered car is an equipage much given to shaking, seeing that it has a heavy top like a London cab, and that it runs on a pair of wheels. It is entered from behind, and slopes backwards. The sitter

sits sideways, between a cracked window on one side and a cracked doorway on the other; and as a draught is always going in at the ear next the window, and out at the ear next the door, it is about as cold and comfortless a vehicle for winter as may be well imagined. Now the journey from Castle Richmond to Cork has to be made right across the Boggeragh Mountains. It is over twenty miles Irish; and the road is never very good. Mr. Mollett, therefore, was five hours in the covered car on his return journey; and as he had stopped for lunch at Kanturk, and had not hurried himself at that meal, it was very dark and very cold when he reached the house in South Main Street.

I think I have explained that Mr. Mollett senior was not absolutely a drunkard; but nevertheless, he was not averse to spirits in cold weather, and on this journey had warmed himself with whisky once or twice on the road. He had found a shebeen house when he crossed the Nad river, and another on the mountain-top, and a third at the point where the road passes near the village of Blarney, and at all these convenient resting-spots Mr. Mollett had endeavoured to warm himself.

There are men who do not become absolutely drunk, but who do become absolutely cross when they drink more than is good for them; and of

such men Mr. Mollett was one. What with the cold air, and what with the whisky, and what with the jolting, Mr. Mollett was very cross when he reached the Kanturk Hotel, so that he only cursed the driver instead of giving him the expected gratuity.

'I'll come to yer honour in the morning,' said the driver.

'You may go to the devil in the morning,' answered Mr. Mollett; and this was the first intimation of his return which reached the ears of his expectant son.

'There's the governor,' said Aby, who was then flirting with Miss O'Dwyer in the bar. 'Somebody's been stroking him the wrong way of the 'air.'

The charms of Miss O'Dwyer in these idle days had been too much for the prudence of Mr. Abraham Mollett; by far too much, considering that in his sterner moments his ambition led him to contemplate a match with a young lady of much higher rank in life. But wine, which 'inspires us' and fires us

'With courage, love, and joy,'

had inspired him with courage to forget his prudence, and with love for the lovely Fanny.

'Now, nonsense, Mr. Aby,' she had said to him a few minutes before the wheels of the

covered car were heard in South Main Street.

'You know you main nothing of the sort.'

'By 'eavens, Fanny, I mean every word of it; may this drop be my poison if I don't. This piece of business here keeps me and the governor hon and hoff like, and will do for some weeks perhaps; but when that's done, honly say the word, and I'll make you Mrs. M. Isn't that fair now?'

'But, Mr. Aby ——'

'Never mind the mister, Fan, between friends.'

'La! I couldn't call you Aby without it; could I?'

'Try, my darling.'

'Well—Aby—there now. It does sound so uppish, don't it? But tell me this now; what is the business that you and the old gentleman is about down at Kanturk?'

Abraham Mollett hereupon had put one finger to his nose, and then winked his eye.

'If you care about me, as you say you do, you wouldn't be shy of just telling me as much as that.'

'That's business, Fan; and business and love don't hamalgamate like whisky and sugar.'

'Then I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Aby; I don't want to have anything to do with a man who won't show his rispect by telling me his sacrets.'

'That's it, is it, Fan?'

'I suppose you think I can't keep a sacret. You think I'd be telling father, I suppose.'

'Well, it's about some money that's due to him down there.'

'Who from?'

'He expects to get it from some of those Fitzgerald people.'

In saying so much Mr. Mollett the younger had not utterly abandoned all prudence. He knew very well that the car-driver and others would be aware that his father had been to Castle Richmond; and that it was more than probable that either he or his father would have to make further visits there. Indeed, he had almost determined that he would go down to the baronet himself. Under these circumstances it might be well that some pretext for these visits should be given.

'Which Fitzgerald, Mr. Aby? Is it the Hap House young man?'

'Hap House. I never heard of such a place. These people live at Castle Richmond.'

'Oh—h—h! If Mr. Mollett have money due there, sure he have a good mark to go upon. Why, Sir Thomas is about the richest man in these parts.'

'And who is this other man; at 'Appy—what is it you call his place?'

'Hap House. Oh, it's he is the thorough-

going young gentleman. Only they say he's a leetle too fast. To my mind, Mr. Owen is the finest-looking man to be seen anywhere's in the county Cork.'

'He's a flame of yours, is he, Fan?'

'I don't know what you main by a flame. But there's not a girl in Cork but what likes the glance of his eye. They do say that he'd have Lady Clara Desmond; only there ain't no money.'

'And what's he to these other people?'

'Cousin, I believe; or hardly so much as that, I'm thinking. But all the same if anything was to happen to young Mr. Herbert, it would all go to him.'

'It would, would it?'

'So people say.'

'Mr. 'Erbert is the son of the old cock at Castle Richmond, isn't he?'

'Just so. He's the young cock; he, he, he!'

'And if he was to be—nowhere like; not his father's son at all, for instance, it would all go to this 'andsome 'Appy 'Ouse man; would it?'

'Every shilling, they say; house, title, and all.'

'Hum,' said Mr. Abraham Mollett; and he began again to calculate his family chances. Perhaps, after all, this handsome young man who was at present too poor to marry his noble lady

love might be the more liberal man to deal with. But then any dealings with him would kill the golden goose at once. All would depend on the size of the one egg which might be extracted.

He certainly felt, however, that this Fitzgerald family arrangement was one which it was beneficial that he should know; but he felt also that it would be by no means necessary at present to communicate the information to his father. He put it by in his mind, regarding it as a fund on which he might draw if occasion should require. It might perhaps be pleasant for him to make the acquaintance of this 'andsome young Fitzgerald of 'Appy 'Ouse.

'And now, Fan, my darling, give us a kiss,' said he, getting up from his seat.

''Deed and I won't,' said Fan, withdrawing herself among the bottles and glasses.

''Deed and you shall, my love,' said Aby, pertinaciously, as he prepared to follow her through the brittle ware.

'Hu—sh—be aisy now. There's Tom. He's ears for everything, and eyes like a cat.'

'What do I care for Tom?'

'And father 'll be coming in. Be aisy, I tell you. I won't now, Mr. Aby; and that's enough. You'll break the bottle.'

'D—— the bottle. That's smashed hany way. Come, Fan, what's a kiss among friends?'

'Cock you up with kisses, indeed! how bad you are for dainties! There; do you hear that? That's the old gentleman;' and then, as the voice of Mr. Mollett senior was heard abusing the car-driver, Miss O'Dwyer smoothed her apron, put her hands to her side hair, and removed the débris of the broken bottle.

'Well, governor,' said Aby, 'how goes it?'

'How goes it, indeed! It goes pretty well I dare say in here, where you can sit drinking toddy all the evening, and doing nothing.'

'Why, what on hearth would you have me be doing? Better here than paddling about in the streets, isn't it?'

'If you could do a stroke of work now and then to earn your bread, it might be better.' Now Aby knew from experience that whenever his father talked to him about earning his bread, he was half drunk and whole cross. So he made no immediate reply on that point.

'You are cold I suppose, governor, and had better get a bit of something to eat, and a little tea.'

'And put my feet in hot water, and tallow my nose, and go to bed, hadn't I? Miss O'Dwyer, I'll trouble you to mix me a glass of brandy-punch. Of all the roads I ever travelled, that's the longest and hardest to get over. Dashed, if I didn't begin to think I'd never be here.' And

so saying he flung himself into a chair, and put up his feet on the two hobs.

There was a kettle on one of them, which the young lady pushed a little nearer to the hot coals, in order to show that the water should be boiling; and as she did so Aby gave her a wink over his father's shoulder, by way of conveying to her an intimation that 'the governor was a little cut,' or in other language tipsy, and that the brandy punch should be brewed with a discreet view to past events of the same description. All which Miss O'Dwyer perfectly understood.

It may easily be conceived that Aby was especially anxious to receive tidings of what had been done this day down in the Kanturk neighbourhood. He had given his views to his father, as will be remembered; and though Mr. Mollett senior had not professed himself as absolutely agreeing with them, he had nevertheless owned that he was imbued with the necessity of taking some great step. He had gone down to take this great step, and Aby was very anxious to know how it had been taken.

When the father and son were both sober, or when the son was tipsy, or when the father was absolutely drunk—an accident which would occur occasionally, the spirit and pluck of the son was in the ascendant. He at such times was the more

masterful of the two, and generally contrived, either by persuasion or bullying, to govern his governor. But when it did happen that Mollett père was half drunk and cross with drink, then, at such moments, Mollett fils had to acknowledge to himself that his governor was not to be governed.

And, indeed, at such moments his governor could be very disagreeable—could say nasty, bitter things, showing very little parental affection, and make himself altogether bad society, not only to his son, but to his son's companions also. Now it appeared to Aby that his father was at present in this condition.

He had only to egg him on to further drinking, and the respectable gentleman would become stupid, noisy, soft, and affectionate. But then, when in that state, he would blab terribly. It was much with the view of keeping him from that state, that under the present circumstances the son remained with the father. To do the father justice, it may be asserted that he knew his own weakness, and that, knowing it, he had abstained from heavy drinking since he had taken in hand this great piece of diplomacy.

'But you must be hungry, governor; won't you take a bit of something?'

'Shall we get you a steek, Mr. Mollett?' asked Miss O'Dwyer, hospitably, 'or just a bit of bacon

with a couple of eggs or so? It wouldn't be a minute, you know?'

'Your eggs are all addled and bad,' said Mr. Mollett; 'and as for a beef-steak, it's my belief there isn't such a thing in all Ireland.' After which civil speech, Miss O'Dwyer winked at Aby, as much as to say, 'You see what a state he's in.'

'Have a bit of buttered toast and a cup of tea, governor,' suggested the son.

'I'm d—— if I do,' replied the father. 'You're become uncommon fond of tea of late—that is for other people. I don't see you take much of it yourself.'

'A cup of tay is the thing to warm one afther such a journey as you've had; that's certain, Mr. Mollett,' said Fanny.

'Them's your ideas about warming, are they, my dear?' said the elderly gentleman. 'Do you come and sit down on my knee here for a few minutes or so, and that'd warm me better than all the "tay" in the world.'

Aby showed by his face that he was immeasurably disgusted by the iniquitous coarseness of this overture. Miss O'Dwyer, however, looking at the gentleman's age, and his state as regarded liquor, passed it over as of no moment whatsoever. So that when, in the later part of the evening, Aby expressed to that young lady his

deep disgust, she merely said, 'Oh, bother; what matters an old man like that?'

And then, when they were at this pass, Mr. O'Dwyer came in. He did not interfere much with his daughter in the bar room, but he would occasionally take a dandy of punch there, and ask how things were going on in doors. He was a fat, thickset man, with a good-humoured face, a flattened nose, and a great aptitude for stable occupations. He was part owner of the Kanturk car, as has been before said, and was the proprietor of sundry other cars, open cars and covered cars, plying for hire in the streets of Cork.

'I hope the mare took your honour well down to Kanturk and back again,' said he, addressing his elder customer with a chuck of his head intended for a bow.

'I don't know what you call well,' said Mr. Mollett. 'She hadn't a leg to stand upon for the last three hours.'

'Not a leg to stand upon! Faix, then, and it's she'd have the four good legs if she travelled every inch of the way from Donagh-a-Dee to Ti-vora,' to which distance Mr. O'Dwyer specially referred as being supposed to be the longest known in Ireland.

'She may be able to do that; but I'm blessed if she's fit to go to Kanturk and back.'

'She's done the work, anyhow,' said Mr. O'Dwyer, who evidently thought that this last argument was conclusive.

'And a precious time she's been about it. Why, my goodness, it would have been better for me to have walked it. As Sir Thomas said to me——'

'What! did you see Sir Thomas Fitzgerald?'

Hereupon Aby gave his father a nudge; but the father either did not appreciate the nudge, or did not choose to obey it.

'Yes; I did see him. Why shouldn't I?'

'Only they do say he's hard to get to speak to now-a-days. He's not over well, you know, these years back.'

'Well or ill he'll see me, I take it, when I go that distance to ask him. There's no doubt about that; is there, Aby?'

'Can't say, I'm sure, not knowing the gentleman,' said Aby.

'We holds land from Sir Thomas, we do; that is, me and my brother Mick, and a better landlord ain't nowhere,' said Mr. O'Dwyer.

'Oh, you're one of the tenants, are you? The rents are paid pretty well, ain't they?'

'To the day,' said Mr. O'Dwyer, proudly.

'What would you think now——' Mr. Mollett was continuing; but Aby interrupted him somewhat violently.

'Hold your confounded stupid tongue, will you, you old jolterhead;' and on this occasion he put his hand on his father's shoulder and shook him.

'Who are you calling jolterhead? Who do you dare to speak to in that way? you impudent young cub you. Am I to ask your leave when I want to open my mouth?'

Aby had well known that his father in his present mood would not stand the manner in which the interruption was attempted. Nor did he wish to quarrel before the publican and his daughter. But anything was better than allowing his father to continue in the strain in which he was talking.

'You are talking of things which you don't hunderstand, and about people you don't know,' said Aby. 'You've had a drop too much on the road too, and you 'ad better go to bed.'

Old Mollett turned round to strike at his son; but even in his present state he was somewhat quelled by Aby's eye. Aby was keenly alive to the necessity for prudence on his father's part, though he was by no means able to be prudent himself.

'Talking of things which I don't understand, am I?' said the old man. 'That's all you know about it. Give me another glass of that brandy toddy, my dear.'

But Aby's look had quelled, or at any rate silenced him; and though he did advance another stage in tipsiness before they succeeded in getting him off to bed, he said no more about Sir Thomas Fitzgerald or his Castle Richmond secrets.

Nevertheless, he had said enough to cause suspicion. One would not have imagined, on looking at Mr. O'Dwyer, that he was a very crafty person, or one of whose finesse in affairs of the world it would be necessary to stand much in awe. He seemed to be thick, and stolid, and incapable of deep inquiry; but, nevertheless, he was as fond of his neighbours' affairs as another, and knew as much about the affairs of his neighbours at Kanturk as any man in the county Cork.

He himself was a Kanturk man, and his wife had been a Kanturk woman; no less a person, indeed, than the sister of father Bernard M'Carthy, rest her soul;—for it was now at peace, let us all hope. She had been dead these ten years; but he did not the less keep up his connection with the old town, or with his brother-in-law the priest, or with the affairs of the persons there adjacent; especially, we may say, those of his landlord, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, under whom he still held a small farm, in conjunction with his brother Mick, the publican at Kanturk.

'What's all that about Sir Thomas?' said he

to his daughter in a low voice as soon as the Molletts had left the bar.

'Well, I don't just know,' said Fanny. She was a good daughter, and loved her father, whose indoor affairs she kept tight enough for him. But she had hardly made up her mind as yet whether or no it would suit her to be Mrs. Abraham Mollett. Should such be her destiny, it might be as well for her not to talk about her husband's matters.

'Is it true that the old man did see Sir Thomas to-day?'

'You heard what passed, father; but I suppose it is true.'

'And the young 'un has been down to Kanturk two or three times. What can the like of them have to do with Sir Thomas?'

To this Fanny could only say that she knew nothing about it, which in the main was true. Aby, indeed, had said that his father had gone down to collect money that was due to him; but then Fanny did not believe all that Aby said.

'I don't like that young 'un at all,' continued Mr. O'Dwyer. 'He's a nasty, sneaking fellow, as cares for no one but his own belly. I'm not over fond of the old 'un neither.'

'They is both free enough with their money, father,' said the prudent daughter.

'Oh, they is welcome in the way of business,

in course. But look here, Fan; don't you have nothing to say to that Aby; do you hear me?'

'Who? I? ha, ha, ha!'

'It's all very well laughing; but mind what I says, for I won't have it. He is a nasty, sneaking, good-for-nothing fellow, besides being a heretic. What'd your uncle Bernard say?'

'Oh! for the matter of that, if I took a liking to a fellow I shouldn't ask Uncle Bernard what he had to say. If he didn't like it, I suppose he might do the other thing.'

'Well, I won't have it. Do you hear that?'

'Laws, father, what nonsense you do talk. Who's thinking about the man? He comes here for what he wants to ate and dhrink, and I suppose the house is free to him as another. If not we'd betther just shut up the front door.' After which she tossed herself up and began to wipe her glasses in a rather dignified manner.

Mr. O'Dwyer sat smoking his pipe and chewing the cud of his reflections. 'They ain't afther no good; I'm sure of that.' In saying which, however, he referred to the doings of the Molletts down at Kanturk, rather than to any amatory proceedings which might have taken place between the young man and his daughter.

On the following morning Mr. Mollett senior awoke with a racking headache. My belief is, that when men pay this penalty for drinking,

they are partly absolved from other penalties. The penalties on drink are various. I mean those which affect the body, exclusive of those which affect the mind. There are great red swollen noses, very disagreeable both to the wearer and his acquaintances; there are morning headaches, awful to be thought of; there are sick stomachs, by which means the offender escapes through a speedy purgatory; there are sallow cheeks, sunken eyes, and shaking shoulders; there are very big bellies, and no bellies at all; and there is delirium tremens. For the most part a man escapes with one of these penalties. If he have a racking headache, his general health does not usually suffer so much as though he had endured no such immediate vengeance from violated nature. Young Aby when he drank had no headaches; but his eye was bloodshot, his cheek bloated, and his hand shook. His father, on the other hand, could not raise his head after a debauch; but when that was gone, all ill results of his imprudence seemed to have vanished.

At about noon on that day Aby was sitting by his father's bedside. Up to that time it had been quite impossible to induce him to speak a word. He could only groan, swallow soda-water with 'hairs of the dog that bit him' in it, and lay with his head between his arms. But soon after noon Aby did induce him to say a word or two.

The door of the room was closely shut, the little table was strewed with soda-water bottles and last drops of small goes of brandy. Aby himself had a cigar in his mouth, and on the floor near the bed-foot was a plate with a cold, greasy mutton chop, Aby having endeavoured in vain to induce his father to fortify exhausted nature by eating. The appearance of the room and the air within it would not have been pleasant to fastidious people. But then the Molletts were not fastidious.

'You did see Sir Thomas, then?'

'Yes, I did see him. I wish, Aby, you'd let me lie just for another hour or so. I'd be all right then. The jolting of that confounded car has nearly shaken my head to pieces.'

But Aby was by no means inclined to be so merciful. The probability was that he would be able to pump his father more thoroughly in his present weak state than he might do in a later part of the afternoon; so he persevered.

'But, governor, it's so important we should know what we're about. Did you see any one else except himself?'

'I saw them all I believe, except her. I was told she never showed in the morning; but I'm blessed if I don't think I saw the skirt of her dress through an open door. I'll tell you what, Aby, I could not stand that.'

'Perhaps, father, after hall it'll be better I should manage the business down there.'

'I believe there won't be much more to manage. But, Aby, do leave me now, there's a good fellow; then in another hour or so I'll get up, and we'll have it all out.'

'When you're out in the open air and comfortable, it won't be fair to be bothering you with business. Come, governor, ten minutes will tell the whole of it if you'll only mind your eye. How did you begin with Sir Thomas?' And then Aby went to the door, opened it very gently, and satisfied himself that there was nobody listening on the landing-place.

Mr. Mollett sighed wearily, but he knew that his only hope was to get this job of talking over. 'What was it you were saying, Aby?'

'How did you begin with Sir Thomas?'

'How did I begin with him? Let me see. Oh! I just told him who I was; and then he turned away and looked down under the fire like, and I thought he was going to make a faint of it.'

'I didn't suppose he would be very glad to see you, governor.'

'When I saw how badly he took it, and how wretched he seemed, I almost made up my mind to go away and never trouble him any more.'

'You did, did you?'

'And just to take what he'd choose to give me.'

'Oh, them's your hideas, hare they? Then I tell you what; I shall just take the matter into my own hands hentirely. You have no more 'eart than a chicken.'

'Ah, that's very well, Aby; but you did not see him.'

'Do you think that would make hany difference? When a man's a job of work to do, 'e should do it. Them's my notions. Do you think a man like that is to go and hact in that way, and then not pay for it? Whose wife is she I'd like to know?'

There was a tone of injured justice about Aby which almost roused the father to participate in the son's indignation. 'Well; I did my best, though the old gentleman was in such a taking,' said he.

'And what was your best? Come, out with it at once.'

'I—m-m. I—just told him who I was, you know.'

'I guess he understood that quite well.'

'And then I said things weren't going exactly well with me.'

'You shouldn't have said that at all. What matters that to him? What you hask for you hask for because you're able to demand it.

That's the ground for hus to take, and by —— I'll take it too. There shall be no 'alf-measures with me.'

'And then I told him—just what we were agreed, you know.'

'That we'd go snacks in the whole concern?'

'I didn't exactly say that.'

'Then what the devil did you say?'

'Why, I told him that, looking at what the property was, twelve hundred pounds wasn't much.'

'I should think not either.'

'And that if his son was to be allowed to have it all——'

'A bastard, you know, keeping it away from the proper heir.' It may almost be doubted whether, in so speaking, Aby did not almost think that he himself had a legitimate right to inherit the property at Castle Richmond.

'He must look to pay up handsome.'

'But did you say what 'andsome meant?'

'Well, I didn't—not then. He fell about upon the table like, and I wasn't quite sure he wouldn't make a die of it; and then heaven knows what might have happened to me.'

'Psha; you 'as no pluck, governor.'

'I'll tell you what it is, Aby, I ain't so sure you'd have such an uncommon deal of pluck yourself.'

'Well, I'll try at any rate.'

'It isn't such a pleasant thing to see an old gentleman in that state. And what would happen if he chose to ring the bell and order the police to take me? Have you ever thought of that?'

'Gammon.'

'But it isn't gammon. A word from him would put me into quod, and there I should be for the rest of my days. But what would you care for that?' And poor Mr. Mollett senior shook under the bedclothes as his attention became turned to this very dreary aspect of his affairs. 'Pluck, indeed! I'll tell you what it is, Aby, I often wonder at my own pluck.'

'Psha! Wouldn't a word from you split upon him, and upon her, and upon the young 'un, and ruin 'em? Or a word from me either, for the matter of that?'

Mr. Mollett senior shook again. He repented now, as he had already done twenty times, that he had taken that son of his into his confidence.

'And what on hearth did you say to him?' continued Aby.

'Well, not much more then; at least, not very much more. There was a good deal of words, but they didn't seem to lead to much, except this, just to make him understand that he must come down handsome.'

'And there was nothing done about Hemmiline?'

'No,' said the father, rather shortly.

'If that was settled, that would be the clincher. There would be no further trouble to nobody then. It would be all smooth sailing for your life, governor, and lots of tin.'

'I tell you what it is, Aby, you may just drop that, for I won't have the young lady bothered about it, nor yet the young lady's father.'

'You won't, won't you?'

'No, I won't; so there's an end of it.'

'I suppose I may pay my distresses to any young lady if I think fitting.'

'And have yourself kicked into the ditch.'

'I know too much for kicking, governor.'

'They shall know as much as you do, and more too, if you go on with that. There's a measure in all things. I won't have it done, so I tell you.' And the father turned his face round to the wall.

This was by no means the end of the conversation, though we need not verbatim go through any more of it. It appeared that old Mollett had told Sir Thomas that his permanent silence could be purchased by nothing short of a settled 'genteel' income for himself and his son, no absolute sum having been mentioned; and that Sir Thomas had required a fortnight for his

answer, which answer was to be conveyed to Mr. Mollett verbally at the end of that time. It was agreed that Mr. Mollett should repeat his visit to Castle Richmond on that day fortnight.

'In the mean time I'll go down and freshen the old gentleman up a bit,' said Aby, as he left his father's bedroom.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REJECTED SUITOR.

After the interview between Herbert and his mother, it became an understood thing at Castle Richmond that he was engaged to Lady Clara. Sir Thomas raised no further objection, although it was clear to all the immediate family that he was by no means gratified at his son's engagement. Very little more passed between Sir Thomas and Lady Fitzgerald on the subject. He merely said that he would consider the question of his son's income, and expressed a hope, or perhaps an opinion rather than a hope, that the marriage would not take place quite immediately.

Under these circumstances, Herbert hardly spoke further to his father upon the matter. He certainly did feel sore that he should be so treated—that he should be made to understand that there was a difficulty, but that the difficulty could not be explained to him. No absolute opposition was however made, and he would not

therefore complain. As to money, he would say nothing till something should be said to him.

With his mother, however, the matter was different. She had said that she would welcome Clara; and she did so. Immediately after speaking to Sir Thomas she drove over to Desmond Court, and said soft, sweet things to Clara in her most winning way;—said soft things also to the countess, who received them very graciously; took Clara home to Castle Richmond for that night, somewhat to the surprise and much to the gratification of Herbert, who found her sitting slily with the other girls when he came in before dinner; and arranged for her to make a longer visit after the interval of a week or two. Herbert, therefore, was on thoroughly good terms with his mother, and did enjoy some of the delights which he had promised himself.

With his sisters, also, and especially with Emmeline, he was once more in a good humour. To her he made ample apology for his former crossness, and received ample absolution. 'I was so harassed,' he said, 'by my father's manner that I hardly knew what I was doing. And even now, when I think of his evident dislike to the marriage, it nearly drives me wild.' The truth of all which Emmeline sadly acknowledged. How could any of them talk of their father except in a strain of sadness?

All these things did not happen in the drawing-room at Castle Richmond without also being discussed in the kitchen. It was soon known over the house that Master Herbert was to marry Lady Clara, and, indeed, there was no great pretence of keeping it secret. The girls told the duchess, as they called Mrs. Jones—of course in confidence—but Mrs. Jones knew what such confidence meant, especially as the matter was more than once distinctly alluded to by her ladyship; and thus the story was told, in confidence, to everybody in the establishment, and then repeated by them, in confidence also, to nearly everybody out of it.

Ill news, they say, flies fast; and this news, which, going in that direction, became ill, soon flew to Hap House.

'So young Fitzgerald and the divine Clara are to hit it off, are they?' said Captain Donnellan, who had driven over from Buttevant barracks to breakfast at Hap House on a hunting-morning.

There were other men present, more intimate friends of Owen than this captain, who had known of Owen's misfortune in that quarter; and a sign was made to Donnellan to bid him drop the subject; but it was too late.

'Who? my cousin Herbert,' said Owen, sharply. 'Have you heard of this, Barry?'

'Well,' said Barry, 'those sort of things are

always being said, you know. I did hear something of it somewhere. But I can't say I thought much about it.' And then the subject was dropped during that morning's breakfast. They all went to the hunt, and in the course of the day Owen contrived to learn that the report was well founded.

That evening, as the countess and her daughter were sitting together over the fire, the gray-headed old butler brought in a letter upon an old silver salver, saying, 'For Lady Clara, if you please, my lady.'

The countess not unnaturally thought that the despatch had come from Castle Richmond, and smiled graciously as Clara put out her hand for the missive. Lady Desmond again let her eyes drop upon the book which she was reading, as though to show that she was by far too confiding a mamma to interfere in any correspondence between her daughter and her daughter's lover. At the moment Lady Clara had been doing nothing. Her work was, indeed, on her lap, and her workbox was at her elbow; but her thoughts had been far away; far away as regards idea, though not so as to absolute locality; for in her mind she was walking beneath those elm-trees, and a man was near her, with a horse following at his heels.

'The messenger is to wait for an answer, my

lady,' said the old butler, with a second nod, which on this occasion was addressed to Clara; and then the man withdrew.

Lady Clara blushed ruby red up to the roots of her hair when her eyes fell on the address of the letter, for she knew it to be in the handwriting of Owen Fitzgerald. Perhaps the countess from the corner of her eye may have observed some portion of her daughter's blushes; but if so, she said nothing, attributing them to Clara's natural bashfulness in her present position. 'She will get over it soon,' the countess may probably have said to herself.

Clara was indecisive, disturbed in her mind, and wretched. Owen had sent her other letters; but they had been brought to her surreptitiously, had been tendered to her in secret, and had always been returned by her unopened. She had not told her mother of these; at least, not purposely or at the moment: but she had been at no trouble to conceal the facts; and when the countess had once asked, she freely told her what had happened with an absence of any confusion which had quite put Lady Desmond at her ease. But this letter was brought to her in the most open manner, and an answer to it openly demanded.

She turned it round slowly in her hand, and then looking up, said, 'Mamma, this is from Owen Fitzgerald; what had I better do with it?'

'From Owen Fitzgerald! Are you sure?'

'Yes, mamma.' And then the countess had also to consider what steps under such circumstances had better be taken. In the mean time Clara held out her hand, tendering the letter to her mother.

'You had better open it, my dear, and read it. No doubt it must be answered.' Lady Desmond felt that now there could be no danger from Owen Fitzgerald. Indeed she thought that there was not a remembrance of him left in her daughter's bosom; that the old love, such baby-love as there had been, had vanished, quite swept out of that little heart by this new love of a brighter sort. But then Lady Desmond knew nothing of her daughter.

So instructed, Clara broke the seal, and read the letter, which ran thus:—

'Hap House, February, 184—.

'My promised Love,

'For let what will happen, such you are; I have this morning heard tidings which, if true, will go far to drive me to despair. But I will not believe them from any lips save your own. I have heard that you are engaged to marry Herbert Fitzgerald. At once, however, I declare that I do not believe the statement. I have known you too well to think that you can be false.

'But, at any rate, I beg the favour of an interview with you. After what has passed I think that under any circumstances I have a right to demand it. I have pledged myself to you; and as that pledge has been accepted, I am entitled to some consideration.

'I write this letter to you openly, being quite willing that you should show it to your mother if you think fit. My messenger will wait, and I do implore you to send me an answer. And remember, Lady Clara, that, having accepted my love, you cannot whistle me down the wind as though I were of no account. After what has passed between us, you cannot surely refuse to see me once more.

'Ever your own—if you will have it so,

'OWEN FITZGERALD.'

She read the letter very slowly, ever and anon looking up at her mother's face, and seeing that her mother was—not reading her book, but pretending to read it. When she had finished it, she held it for a moment, and then said, 'Mamma, will you not look at it?'

'Certainly, my dear, if you wish me to do so.' And she took the letter from her daughter's hand, and read it.

'Just what one would expect from him, my dear; eager, impetuous, and thoughtless. One

should not blame him much, for he does not mean to do harm. But if he had any sense, he would know that he was taking trouble for nothing.'

'And what shall I do, mamma?'

'Well, I really think that I should answer him.' It was delightful to see the perfect confidence which the mother had in her daughter. 'And I think I should see him, if he will insist upon it. It is foolish in him to persist in remembering two words which you spoke to him as a child; but perhaps it will be well that you should tell him yourself that you were a child when you spoke those two words.'

And then Clara sent off the following reply, written under her mother's dictation; though the countess strove very hard to convince her daughter that she was wording it out of her own head:—

'Lady Clara Desmond presents her compliments to Mr. Owen Fitzgerald, and will see Mr. Owen Fitzgerald at Desmond Court at two o'clock to-morrow, if Mr. Owen Fitzgerald persists in demanding such an interview. Lady Clara Desmond, however, wishes to express her opinion that it would be better avoided.

'Desmond Court,
'Thursday evening.'

The countess thought that this note was very cold and formal, and would be altogether conclusive; but, nevertheless, at about eleven o'clock that night there came another messenger from Hap House with another letter, saying that Owen would be at Desmond Court at two o'clock on the following day.

'He is very foolish; that is all I can say,' said the countess.

All that night and all the next morning poor Clara was very wretched. That she had been right to give up a suitor who lived such a life as Owen Fitzgerald lived she could not doubt. But, nevertheless, was she true in giving him up? Had she made any stipulation as to his life when she accepted his love? If he called her false, as doubtless he would call her, how would she defend herself? Had she any defence to offer? It was not only that she had rejected him, a poor lover; but she had accepted a rich lover! What could she say to him when he upbraided her for such sordid conduct?

And then as to her whistling him down the wind. Did she wish to do that? In what state did her heart stand towards him? Might it not be that, let her be ever so much on her guard, she would show him some tenderness,—tenderness which would be treason to her present affianced

suitor? Oh, why had her mother desired her to go through such an interview as this!

When two o'clock came Clara was in the drawing-room. She had said nothing to her mother as to the manner in which this meeting should take place. But then at first she had had an idea that Lady Desmond would be present. But as the time came near Clara was still alone. When her watch told her that it was already two, she was still by herself; and when the old servant, opening the door, announced that Mr. Fitzgerald was there, she was still unsupported by the presence of any companion. It was very surprising that on such an occasion her mother should have kept herself away.

She had not seen Owen Fitzgerald since that day when they had walked together under the elm-trees, and it can hardly be said that she saw him now. She had a feeling that she had injured him—had deceived, and in a manner betrayed him; and that feeling became so powerful with her that she hardly dared to look him in the face.

He, when he entered the room, walked straight up to her, and offered her his hand. He, too, looked round the room to see whether Lady Desmond was there, and not finding her, was surprised. He had hardly hoped that such an opportunity would be allowed to him for declaring the strength of his passion.

She got up, and taking his hand, muttered something; it certainly did not matter what, for it was inaudible; but such as the words were, they were the first spoken between them.

'Lady Clara,' he began; and then stopped himself; and, considering, recommenced—'Clara, a report has reached my ears which I will believe from no lips but your own.'

She now sat down on a sofa, and pointed to a chair for him, but he remained standing, and did so during the whole interview; or rather, walking; for when he became energetic and impetuous, he moved about from place to place in the room, as though incapable of fixing himself in one position.

Clara was ignorant whether or no it behoved her to rebuke him for calling her simply by her Christian name. She thought that she ought to do so, but she did not do it.

'I have been told,' he continued, 'that you have engaged yourself to marry Herbert Fitzgerald; and I have now come to hear a contradiction of this from yourself.'

'But, Mr. Fitzgerald, it is true.'

'It is true that Herbert Fitzgerald is your accepted lover?'

'Yes,' she said, looking down upon the ground, and blushing deeply as she said it.

There was a pause of a few moments, during

which she felt that the full fire of his glance was fixed upon her, and then he spoke.

'You may well be ashamed to confess it,' he said; 'you may well feel that you dare not look me in the face as you pronounce the words. I would have believed it, Clara, from no other mouth than your own.'

It appeared to Clara herself now as though she were greatly a culprit. She had not a word to say in her own defence. All those arguments as to Owen's ill course of life were forgotten; and she could only remember that she had acknowledged that she loved him, and that she was now acknowledging that she loved another.

But now Owen had made his accusation; and as it was not answered, he hardly knew how to proceed. He walked about the room, endeavouring to think what he had better say next.

'I know this, Clara; it is your mother's doing, and not your own. You could not bring yourself to be false, unless by her instigation.'

'No,' said she; 'you are wrong there. It is not my mother's doing: what I have done, I have done myself.'

'Is it not true,' he asked, 'that your word was pledged to me? Had you not promised me that you would be my wife?'

'I was very young,' she said, falling back upon the only excuse which occurred to her at the

moment as being possible to be used without incriminating him.

'Young! Is not that your mother's teaching? Why, those were her very words when she came to me at my house. I did not know that youth was any excuse for falsehood.'

'But it may be an excuse for folly,' said Clara.

'Folly! what folly? The folly of loving a poor suitor; the folly of being willing to marry a man who has not a large estate! Clara, I did not think that you could have learned so much in so short a time.'

All this was very hard upon her. She felt that it was hard, for she knew that he had done that which entitled her to regard her pledge to him as at an end; but the circumstances were such that she could not excuse herself.

'Am I to understand,' said Owen Fitzgerald, 'that all that has passed between us is to go for nothing? that such promises as we have made to each other are to be of no account? To me they are sacred pledges, from which I would not escape even if I could.'

As he then paused for a reply, she was obliged to say something.

'I hope you have not come here to upbraid me, Mr. Fitzgerald.'

'Clara,' he continued, 'I have passed the last

year with perfect reliance upon your faith. I need hardly tell you that it has not been passed happily, for it has been passed without seeing you. But though you have been absent from me, I have never doubted you. I have known that it was necessary that we should wait —wait perhaps till years should make you mistress of your own actions: but nevertheless I was not unhappy, for I was sure of your love.'

Now it was undoubtedly the case that Fitzgerald was treating her unfairly; and though she had not her wits enough about her to ascertain this by process of argument, nevertheless the idea did come home to her. It was true that she had promised her love to this man, as far as such promise could be conveyed by one word of assent; but it was true also that she had been almost a child when she pronounced that word, and that things which had since occurred had entitled her to annul any amount of contract to which she might have been supposed to bind herself by that one word. She bethought herself, therefore, that as she was so hard pressed she was forced to defend herself.

'I was very young then, Mr. Fitzgerald, and hardly knew what I was saying: afterwards, when mamma spoke to me, I felt that I was bound to obey her.'

'What, to obey her by forgetting me?'

'No; I have never forgotten you, and never shall. I remember too well your kindness to my brother; your kindness to us all.'

'Psha! you know I do not speak of that. Are you bound to obey your mother by forgetting that you have loved me?'

She paused a moment before she answered him, looking now full before her,—hardly yet bold enough to look him in the face.

'No,' she said; 'I have not forgotten that I loved you. I shall never forget it. Child as I was, it shall never be forgotten. But I cannot love you now—not in the manner you would have me?'

'And why not, Lady Clara? Why is love to cease on your part—to be thrown aside so easily by you, while with me it remains so stern a fact, and so deep a necessity? Is that just? When the bargain has once been made, should it not be equally binding on us both?'

'I do not think you are fair to me, Mr. Fitzgerald,' she said; and some spirit was now rising in her bosom.

'Not fair to you? Do you say that I am unfair to you? Speak but one word to say that the troth which you pledged me a year since shall still remain unbroken, and I will at once leave you till you yourself shall name the time when my suit may be renewed.'

'You know that I cannot do that.'

'And why not? I know that you ought to do it.'

'No, Mr. Fitzgerald, I ought not. I am now engaged to your cousin, with the consent of mamma and of his friends. I can say nothing to you now which I cannot repeat to him; nor can I say anything which shall oppose his wishes.'

'He is then so much more to you now than I am?'

'He is everything to me now.'

'That is all the reply I am to get then! You acknowledge your falseness, and throw me off without vouchsafing me any answer beyond this.'

'What would you have me say? I did do that which was wrong and foolish, when—when we were walking there on the avenue. I did give a promise which I cannot now keep. It was all so hurried that I hardly remember what I said. But of this I am sure, that if I have caused you unhappiness, I am very sorry to have done so. I cannot alter it all now; I cannot unsay what I said then; nor can I offer you that which I have now absolutely given to another.'

And then, as she finished speaking, she did pluck up courage to look him in the face. She was now standing as well as he; but she was so standing that the table, which was placed near the sofa, was still between him and her. As she

finished speaking the door opened, and the Countess of Desmond walked slowly into the room.

Owen Fitzgerald, when he saw her, bowed low before her, and then frankly offered her his hand. There was something in his manner to ladies devoid of all bashfulness, and yet never too bold. He seemed to be aware that in speaking to any lady, be she who she might, he was only exercising his undoubted privilege as a man. He never hummed and hawed and shook in his shoes as though the majesty of womanhood were too great for his encounter. There are such men, and many of them, who carry this dread to the last day of their long lives. I have often wondered what women think of men who regard women as too awful for the free exercise of open speech.

'Mr. Fitzgerald,' she said, accepting the hand which he offered to her, but resuming her own very quickly, and then standing before him in all the dignity which she was able to assume, 'I quite concurred with my daughter that it was right that she should see you, as you insisted on such an interview; but you must excuse me if I interrupt it. I must protect her from the embarrassment which your—your vehemence may occasion her.'

'Lady Desmond,' he replied, 'you are quite at liberty, as far as I am concerned, to hear all that

passes between us. Your daughter is betrothed to me, and I have come to claim from her the fulfilment of her promise.'

'For shame, Mr. Fitzgerald, for shame! When she was a child you extracted from her one word of folly; and now you would take advantage of that foolish word; now, when you know that she is engaged to a man she loves with the full consent of all her friends. I thought I knew you well enough to feel sure that you were not so ungenerous.'

'Ungenerous! no; I have not that generosity which would enable me to give up my very heart's blood, the only joy of my soul, to such a one as my cousin Herbert.'

'You have nothing to give up, Mr. Fitzgerald: you must have known from the very first that my daughter could not marry you——'

'Not marry me! And why not, Lady Desmond? Is not my blood as good as his?—unless, indeed, you are prepared to sell your child to the highest bidder!'

'Clara, my dear, I think you had better leave the room,' said the countess; 'no doubt you have assured Mr. Fitzgerald that you are engaged to his cousin Herbert.'

'Yes, mamma.'

'Then he can have no further claim on your attendance, and his vehemence will terrify you.'

'Vehement! how can I help being vehement when, like a ruined gambler, I am throwing my last chance for such a stake?'

And then he intercepted Clara as she stepped towards the drawing-room door. She stopped in her course, and stood still, looking down upon the ground.

'Mr. Fitzgerald,' said the countess, 'I will thank you to let Lady Clara leave the room. She has given you the answer for which you have asked, and it would not be right in me to permit her to be subjected to further embarrassment.'

'I will only ask her to listen to one word. Clara——'

'Mr. Fitzgerald, you have no right to address my daughter with that freedom,' said the countess; but Owen hardly seemed to hear her.

'I here, in your hearing, protest against your marriage with Herbert Fitzgerald. I claim your love as my own. I bid you think of the promise which you gave me; and I tell you that as I loved you then with all my heart, so do I love you at this moment; so shall I love you always. Now I will not hinder you any longer.'

And then he opened the door for her, and she passed on, bowing to him, and muttering some word of farewell that was inaudible.

He stood for a moment with the door in his

hand, meditating whether he might not say good morning to the countess without returning into the room; but as he so stood she called him. 'Mr. Fitzgerald,' she said; and so he therefore came back, and once more closed the door.

And then he saw that the countenance of Lady Desmond was much changed. Hitherto she had been every inch the countess, stern and cold and haughty; but now she looked at him as she used to look in those old winter evenings when they were accustomed to talk together over the evening fire in close friendliness, while she, Lady Desmond, would speak to him in the intimacy of her heart of her children, Patrick and Clara.

'Mr. Fitzgerald,' she said, and the tone of her voice also was changed. 'You are hardly fair to us; are you?'

'Not fair, Lady Desmond?'

'No, not fair. Sit down now, and listen to me for a moment. If you had a child, a penniless girl like Clara, would you be glad to see her married to such a one as you are yourself?'

'In what way do you mean? Speak out, Lady Desmond.'

'No; I will not speak out, for I would not hurt you. I myself am too fond of you—as an old friend, to wish to do so. That you may marry and live happily, live near us here, so that

we may know you, I most heartily desire. But you cannot marry that child.'

'And why not, if she loves me?'

'Nay, not even if she did. Wealth and position are necessary to the station in which she has been born. She is an earl's daughter, penniless as she is. I will have no secrets from you. As a mother, I could not give her to one whose career is such as yours. As the widow of an earl, I could not give her to one whose means of maintaining her are so small. If you will think of this, you will hardly be angry with me.'

'Love is nothing then?'

'Is all to be sacrificed to your love? Think of it, Mr. Fitzgerald, and let me have the happiness of knowing that you consent to this match.'

'Never!' said he. 'Never!' And so he left the room, without wishing her further farewell.

END OF VOL. I.

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